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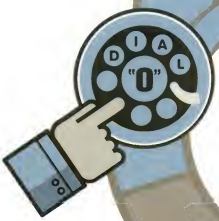

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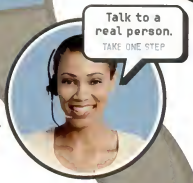

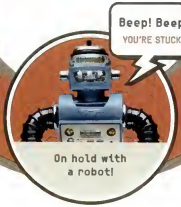

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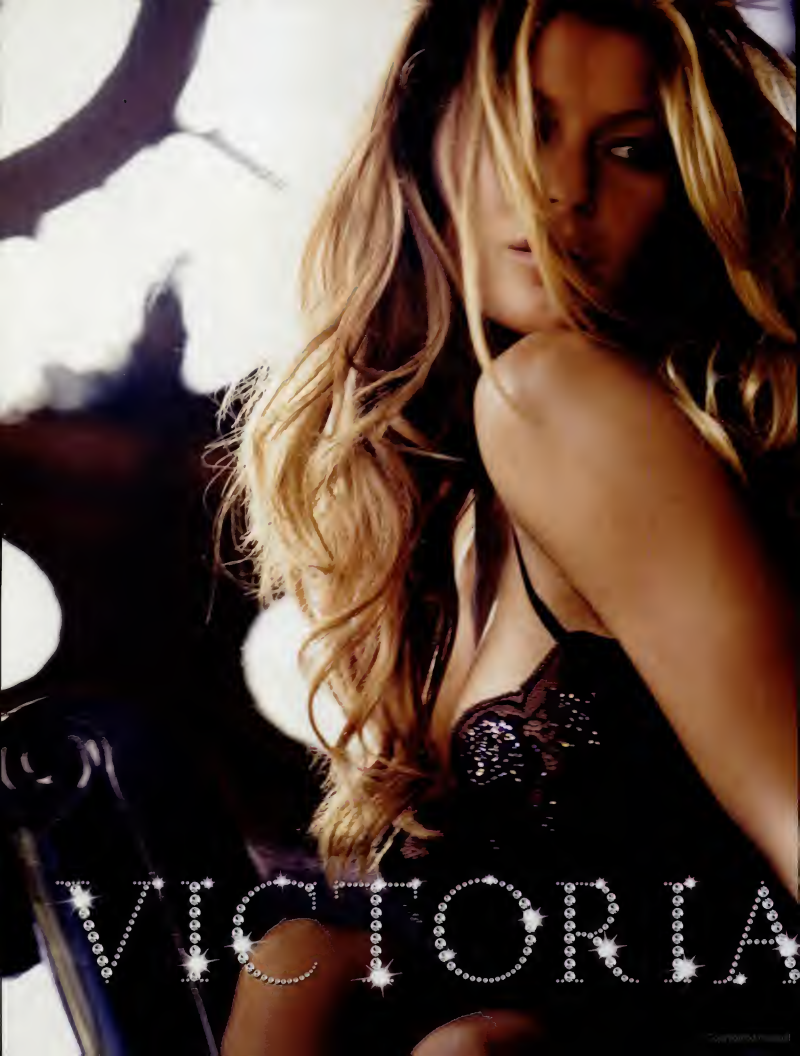
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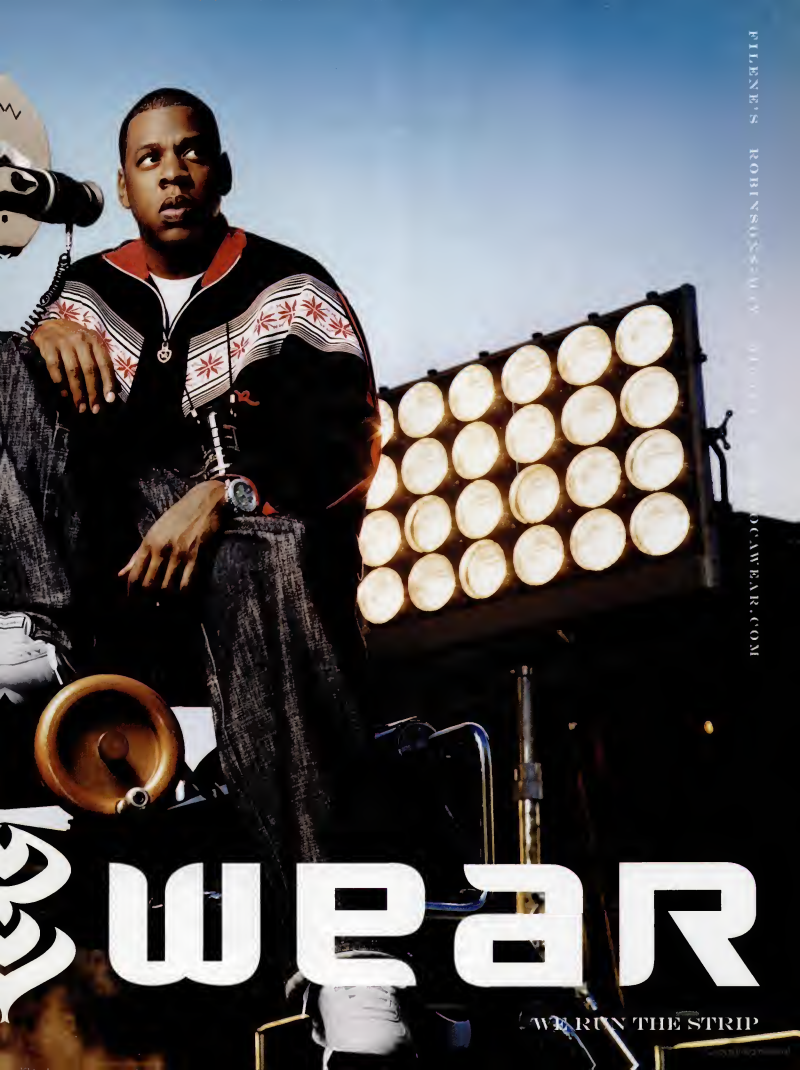
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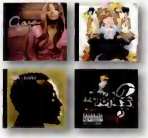

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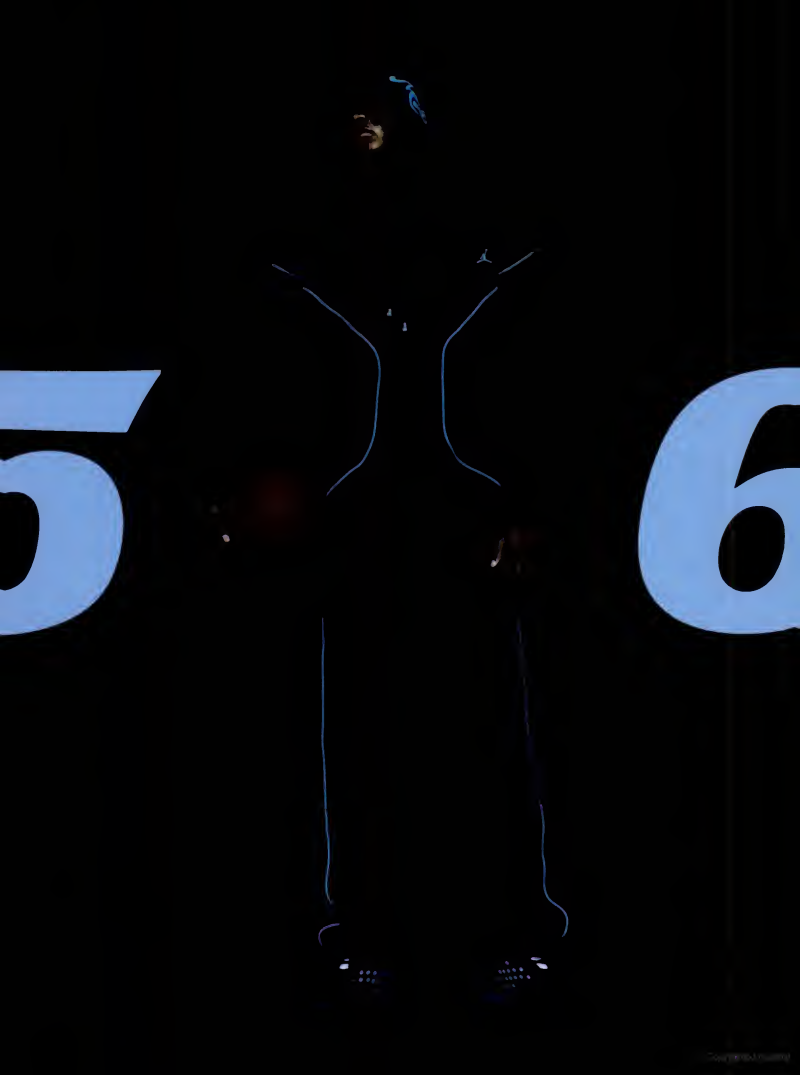
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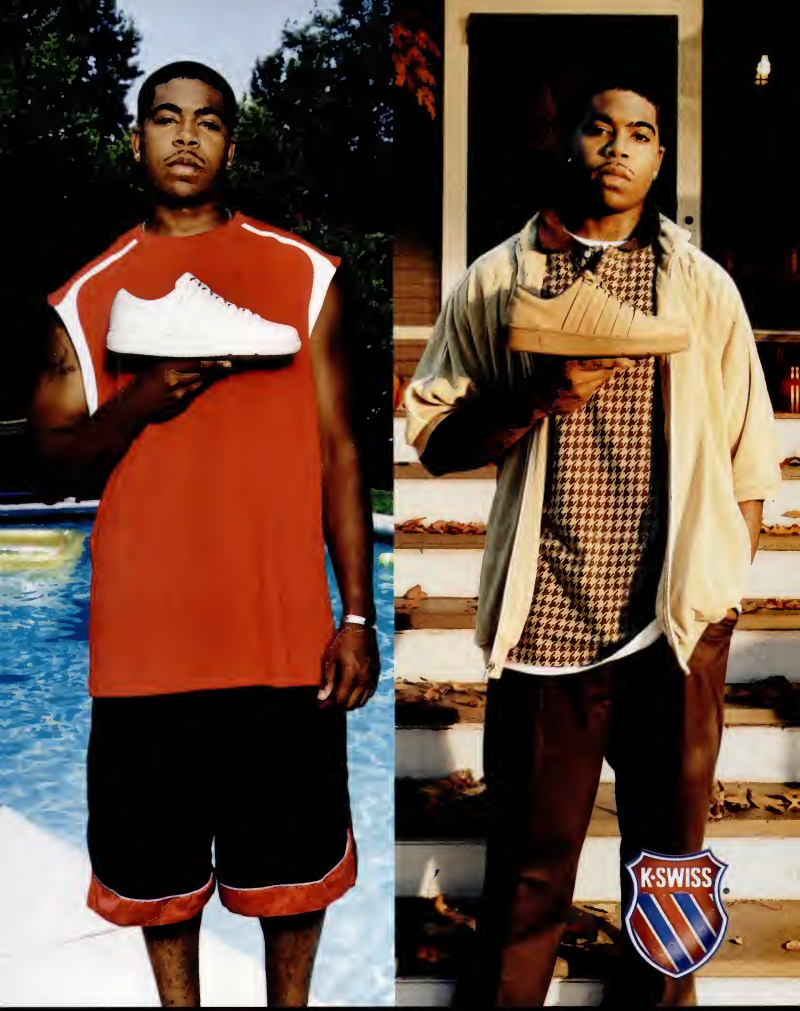

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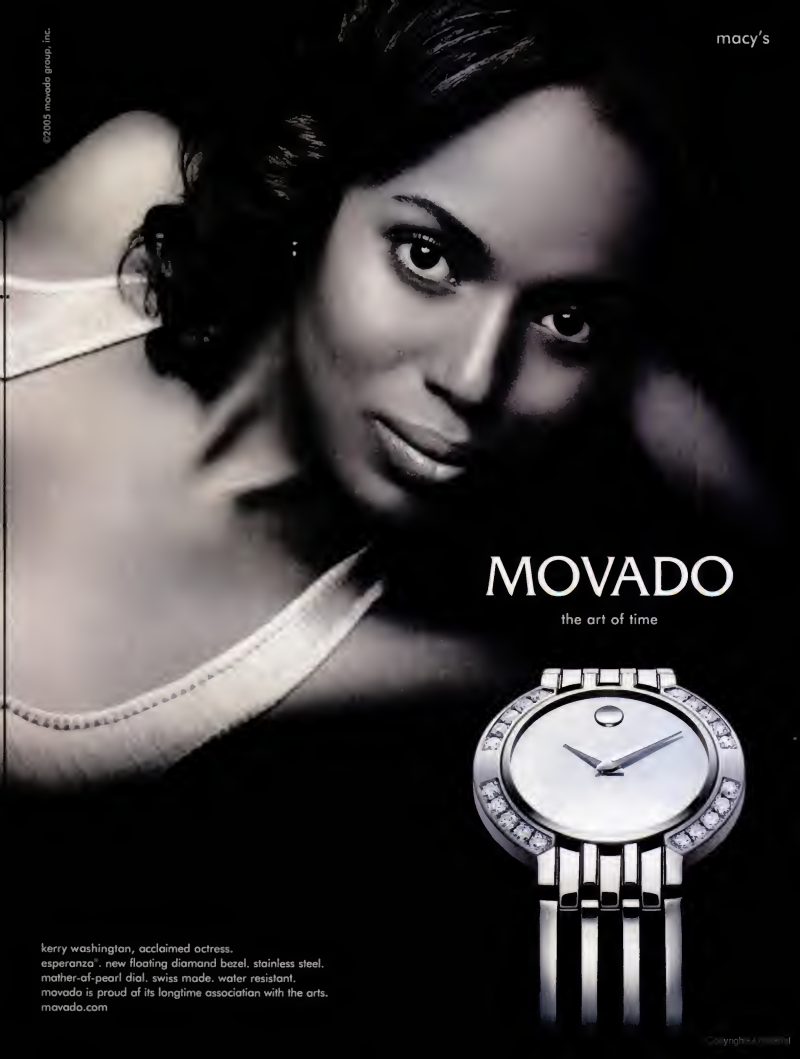
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Hundreds of thousands of people in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast were uprooted by **HURRICANE KATRINA.** Follow them on their journey as they attempt to rebuild their lives, hopes, and dreams—or just plain survive. BY COREY TAKAHASHI. Plus: The Big Easy's fabled musical history, and rap artists speak up.

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> MARY J. BLIGE
On the cover and this page: ("Unbreakable," page 152) photographed exclusively for VIBE by **CLIFF WATTS.**
On the cover: Leopard-print halter top by Roberto Cavalli; jeans by Live Life Denim.
On this page: Ruffle top by Baby Phat; necklace by Robindira Unsworth at Fragments.

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JIMMY "HENCHMEN" ROSEMOND may be a big-time artist manager today, but he'll always have that hard-core rep. [illegible] him for the Quad Recording Studios shooting back in the day. [illegible] he's right smack in the middle of the beef between 50 Cent and the Game. He spills his side of both stories in this exclusive VIBE [illegible] BY ETHAN BROWN. PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANA LIXENBERG

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[illegible] **CARLOS SANTANA** [illegible] career and [illegible] the way down the line. He wants you to lift your sights, too, by caring about people, spirituality, and good music, regardless of genre. BY OLIVER WANG. PHOTOGRAPHS BY VERITY SMITH

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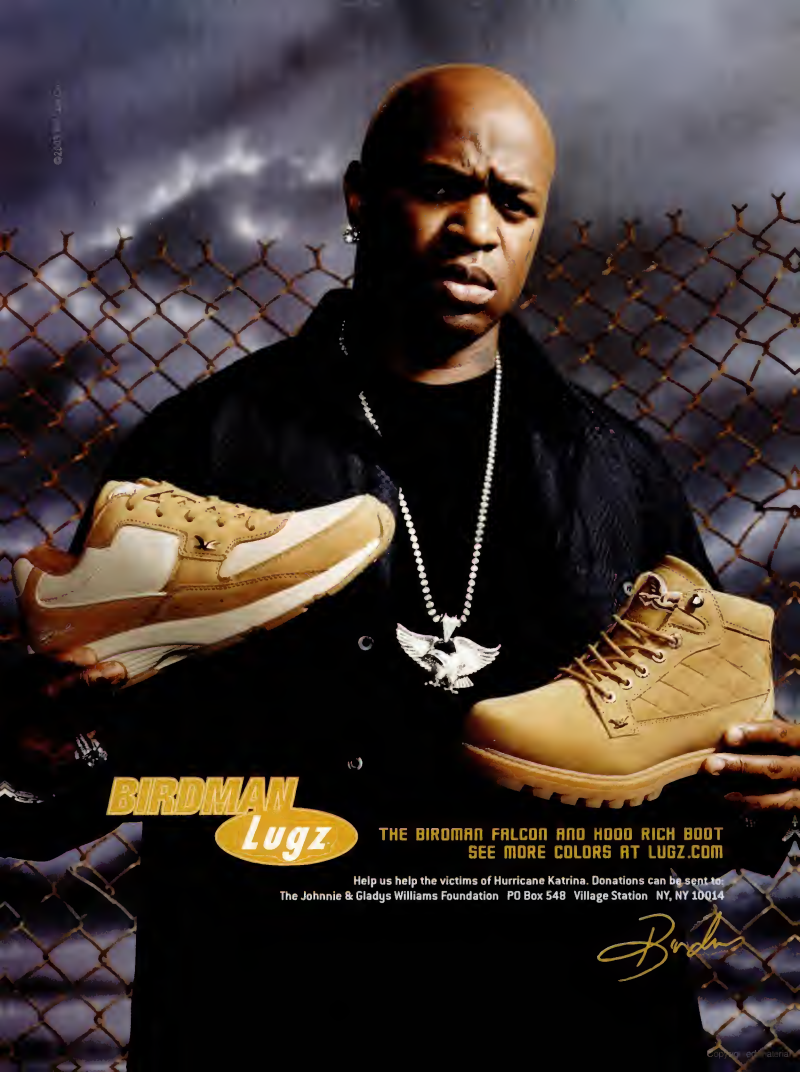
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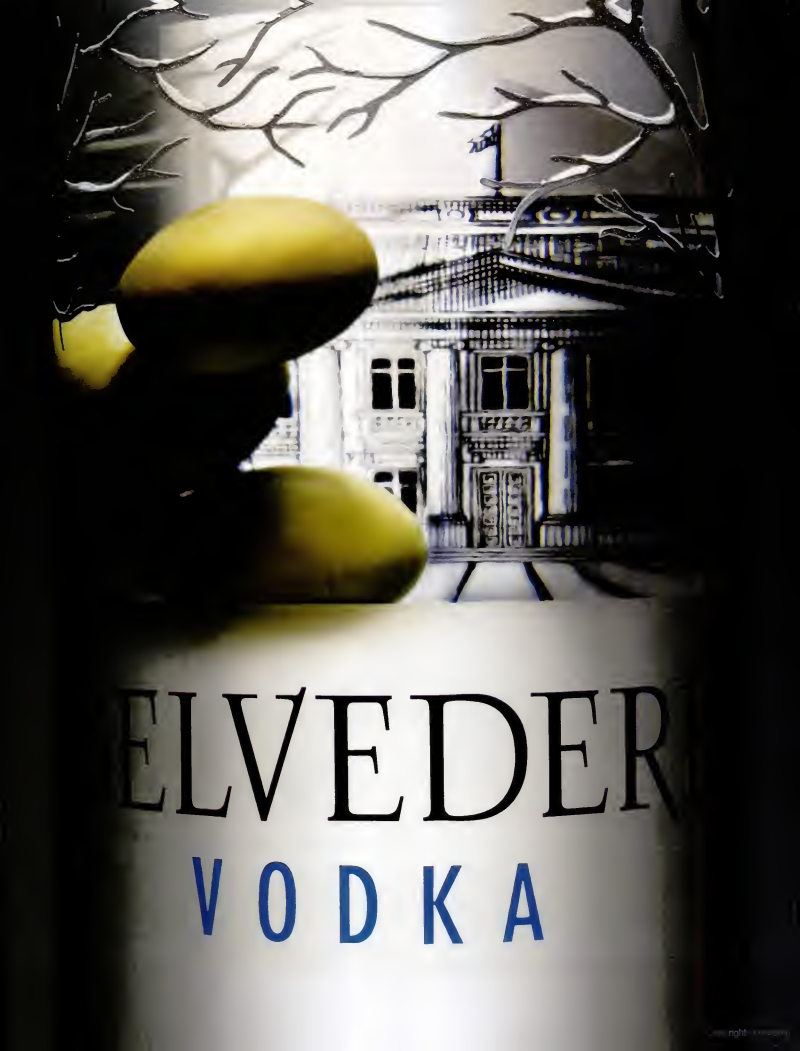
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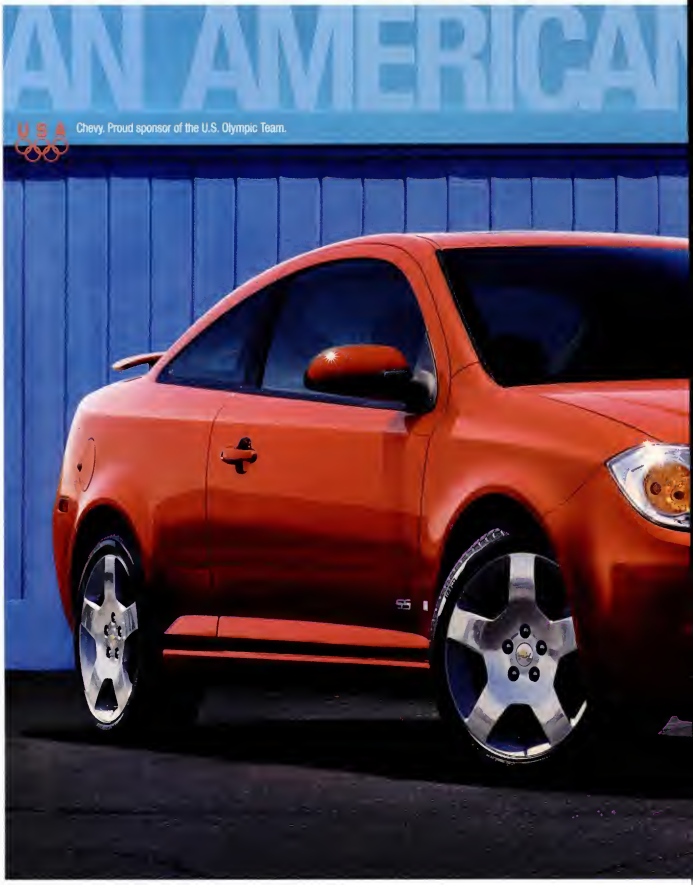

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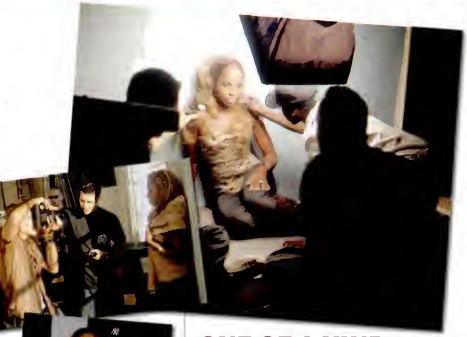

ICONOGRAPHY: (Clockwise from bottom) At this month's cover shoot in Manhattan, photographer Cliff Watts gauges the afternoon light; Mary warms up her smile with VIBE Fashion Director Memsor Kamaraké; Watts double-checks a light reading with first photo assistant, Brian Kendall; "cheese" at last.

ONE OF A KIND

How can anyone not love Mary? While the urban community has adored her since her debut album, '92's *What's the 411?*, the rest of America really got hip when she gave that emotional performance of "No More Drama" at the Grammys in 2002. She got a standing ovation, and, judging by the awestruck look on the faces of celebrities like Celine Dion, Mary clearly demonstrated why she's a legend.

Whenever you're the first to do something, getting props is usually automatic. Although Mary wasn't the first female singer to combine R&B and hip hop (TLC), she did it with passion and soul. Girls in the 'hood immediately identified with her. They wanted her clothes, copied her hairstyles, and mimicked her dance steps. When she sang about the pain of love, her music became the soundtrack to many lives. Mary even won fans among the hardest knucklehead dudes. They, too, were seduced by her realness and fell hard for her beats. The kind of music she created set the standard for every female singer who followed. From Britney Spears to Teairra Marí, everybody has taken a page out of the Mary handbook.

But just like all the greats, she doesn't trip over the fact that she's an icon, a role model for every girl who enters the game. Her advice is always, "Be you." Simple words from a woman who still struggles with the mantra. Even Mary finds it tough to make the right decisions when faced with new challenges. When obstacles get thrown in her life's path, all she can do is remember her goal to be happy. She figures out what personally brings her joy and makes decisions from there. Isn't that a satisfying way to live?

We thank Mary for the incredible music (and life lessons) she's given us since she stepped on the scene. At this year's VIBE Awards, we'll present her with the VLegend Award, recognizing her undeniable influence and impact on the industry and fans. Tune in November 15 at 8 p.m. EST on UPN to watch Mary accept this prestigious honor. In the meantime, turn to Ayana Byrd's candid interview ("Unbreakable," page 152) and other stories that will have you reminiscing about why you'll never fall out of love with Mary.

Elsewhere in the issue are more gems you'll enjoy reading. There's a VIBE Q with Carlos Santana ("The Ringmaster," by Oliver Wang, page 188); an article on Mobb Deep's new status as G Unit soldiers ("Signing Bonus," by Toshitaka Kondo, page 176); and a profile on James Rosemond, aka Jimmy Henchmen, one of the music execs Tupac blamed for his 1994 shooting at Quad Recording Studios ("The Score," by Ethan Brown, page 182). In the aftermath of Katrina, we head down to Louisiana and Texas to tell the stories of those in our community affected by the disaster ("The Scattered City," by Corey Takahashi, page 164) for a side that has yet to be told. Be easy.

MIMI VALDÉS
Editor-in-Chief

WHAT'S NEW AT VIBE

> Congratulations to Aliya S. King, whose article, "Love and Unhappiness," about Al Green and his ex-lover Mary Woodson, in the December 2004 issue, has won ASCAP's prestigious Deems Taylor Award for excellence in music writing.

> Don't miss the Third Annual VIBE Awards on UPN on November 15 at 8 p.m. EST! Check your local listings.

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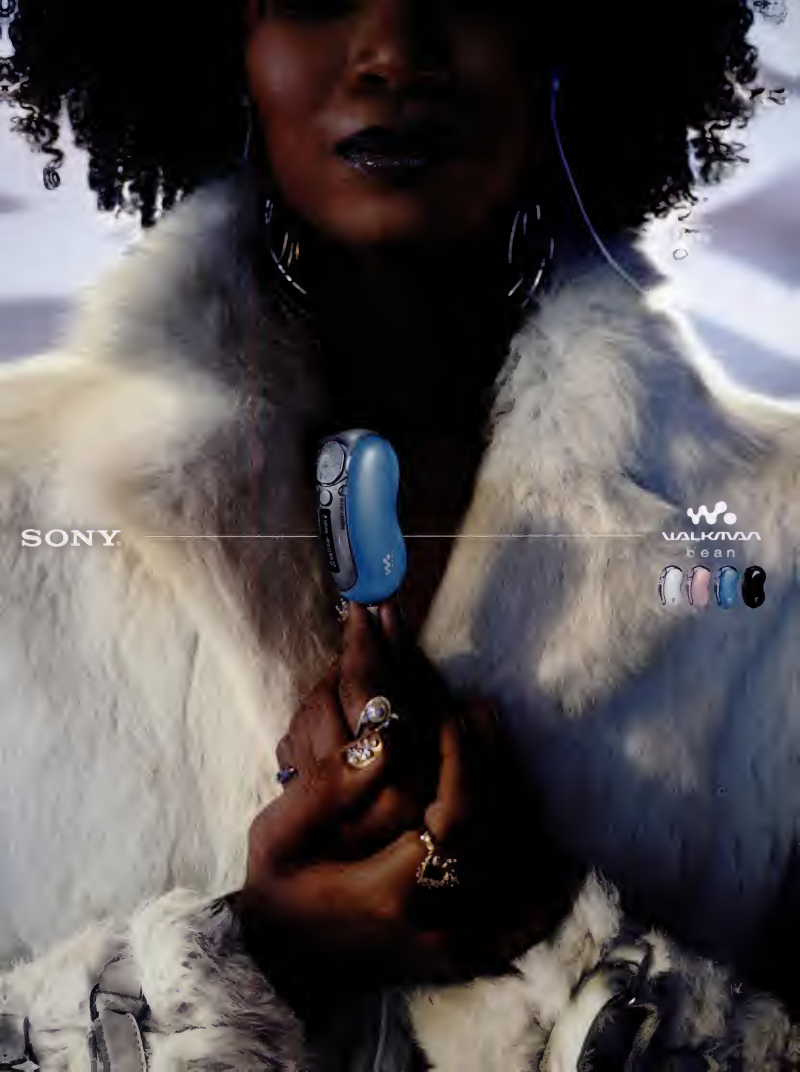
FIRST AND TEN > Starting November 22, we're giving away** 10 copies of EA Sports' *Madden NFL 06* game for your Sony PSP (retail value $50).

HAIL MARY > The first 10 people to tell us the name of the song where Mary J. Blige says, "I would do it all again," will win** a copy of this issue signed by Mary. Log on November 15 for details.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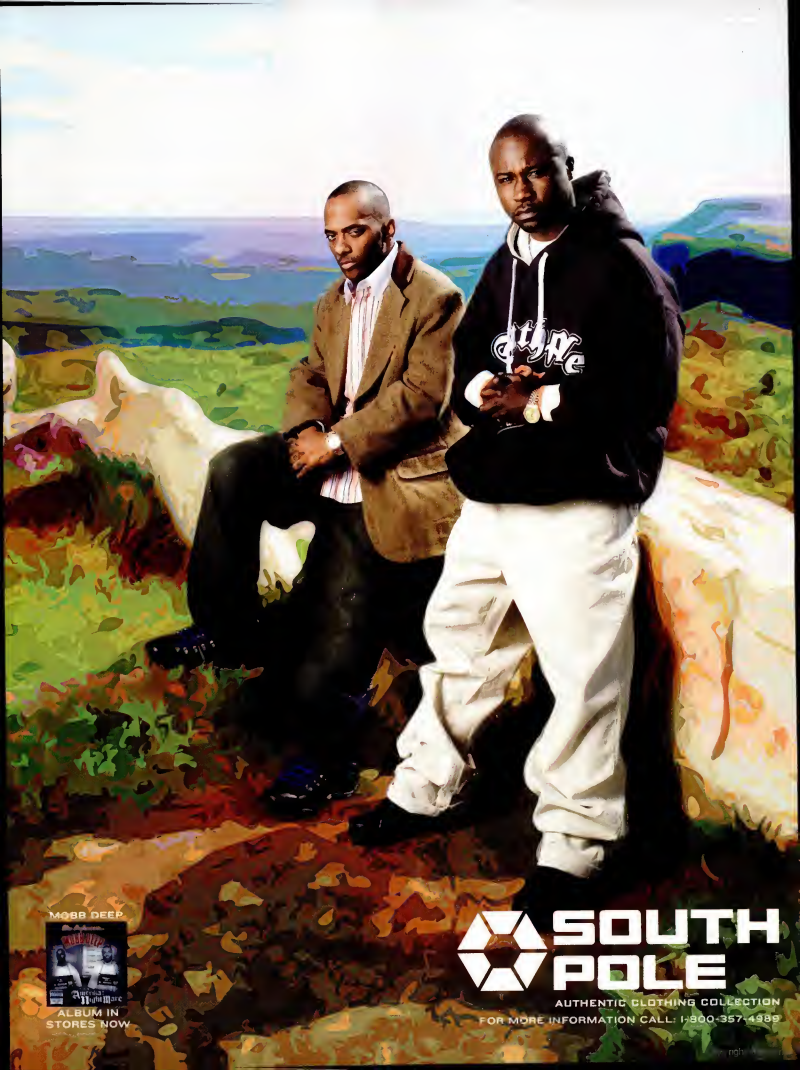
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THE GUEST LIST

> ETHAN BROWN
This month: Profiles veteran music industry insider Jimmy "Henchmen" Rosemond ("The Score," page 180)
Lives in: Brooklyn
Age: 33
Also contributes to: *New York*, *Wired*, *GQ*
Inside scoop: "Jimmy was surprisingly open about what went down with Tupac at Quad Recording Studios."

> AYANA BYRD
This month: Sits down with Mary J. Blige to discuss love, life, and longevity ("Unbreakable," page 152)
Hometown: Philadelphia
Age: 32
Day job: VIBE VIXEN's Deputy Editor
Favorite MJB album: "*My Life*. Played from start to finish, uninterrupted. It's the best!"
Last vacation: Umbria region of Italy

> NOAH RUBIN
This month: Introduces the hot, new gadgetry (Technofile, "Gotta Stay Fly," page 125)
Based in: New York City
Age: 26
Day job: *Scratch Magazine*'s technology editor
Favorite toy: "Twelve-inch PowerBook G4. Like a good woman, it's petite and does everything."
Bill Gates or Steve Jobs? "Coke or Pepsi?"

> VERITY SMITH
This month: Photographs guitar guru Carlos Santana ("The Ringmaster," page 188)
Hails from: Los Angeles
Age: 26
Also featured in: *Dazed & Confused*, *Bust*
Worst movie ever: M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village*
Best song to shoot to: Jamiroquai's "Virtual Insanity"

> CLIFF WATTS
This month: Snaps Mary J. Blige for our cover story ("Unbreakable," page 152)
Born in: San Jose, Calif.
Age: 45
Side hustle: *Vanity Fair*, *Esquire*
Favorite photographer: Bruce Davidson
New York or L.A.? "New York is more exciting, but L.A. is better for a barbecue or a swim party."

in-house counsel

> Former executive editor **OJ LIMA**, 33, rejoins VIBE as an Editor-at-Large; he left three years ago to pen his first novel, *No Room for Squares*. Our editorial brand consultant, the U. Penn. grad ensures the company's projects maintain a creative edge, whether in movie, CD, or TV form. He also runs his own art foundation and cooks—a lot. "I throw down in the kitchen."

BOOM: DAVE GILES

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VIBE RATERS

CHECK OUT THE STAFF'S PLAYLIST

< **FEMI KUTI, *Fight to Win*** (MCA):
"Doing his father proud."
–Abena Agyeman-Fisher, Copy Editor

DESTINY'S CHILD, "Emotion" (Columbia):
"Better than the Bee-Gees."
–Lori Yacovone, Managing Editor

DAMIAN "JR. GONG" MARLEY, "There for You" (Universal):
"It's like a new Bob Marley song."
–Mimi Valdés, Editor-in-Chief

< **MARIAH CAREY, FEAT. JAY-Z & YOUNG JEEZY, "Shake It Off (remix)"** (Def Jam):
"All shook up."
–Erik Parker, Music Editor

RYAN ADAMS & THE CARDINALS, "Sweet Illusions" (Lost Highway):
"Not a happy ending."
–Florian Bachleda, Design Director

< **AZ, "The Come Up"** (Koch):
"Still visualizing the realism of life and actuality."
–Angie Romero, Assistant Music Editor

KMC, FEAT. BEENIE MAN, "Soul on Fire" (Sequence):
"Sexy soca jam."
–Jazmin Perez, Assistant Managing Editor

< **SI*SÉ, *More Shine*** (Fuerte):
"It's like Portishead meets Buena Vista Social Club."
–OJ Lima, Editor-at-Large

CAETANO VELOSO, "Triste Bahia" (PolyGram):
"The drums put you in a trance."
–Alice Alves, Associate Art Director

< **MAROONS, *Songs About Jane*** (Octone):
"There's something very soulful about Adam Levine."
–Rondell Conway, Associate Music Editor

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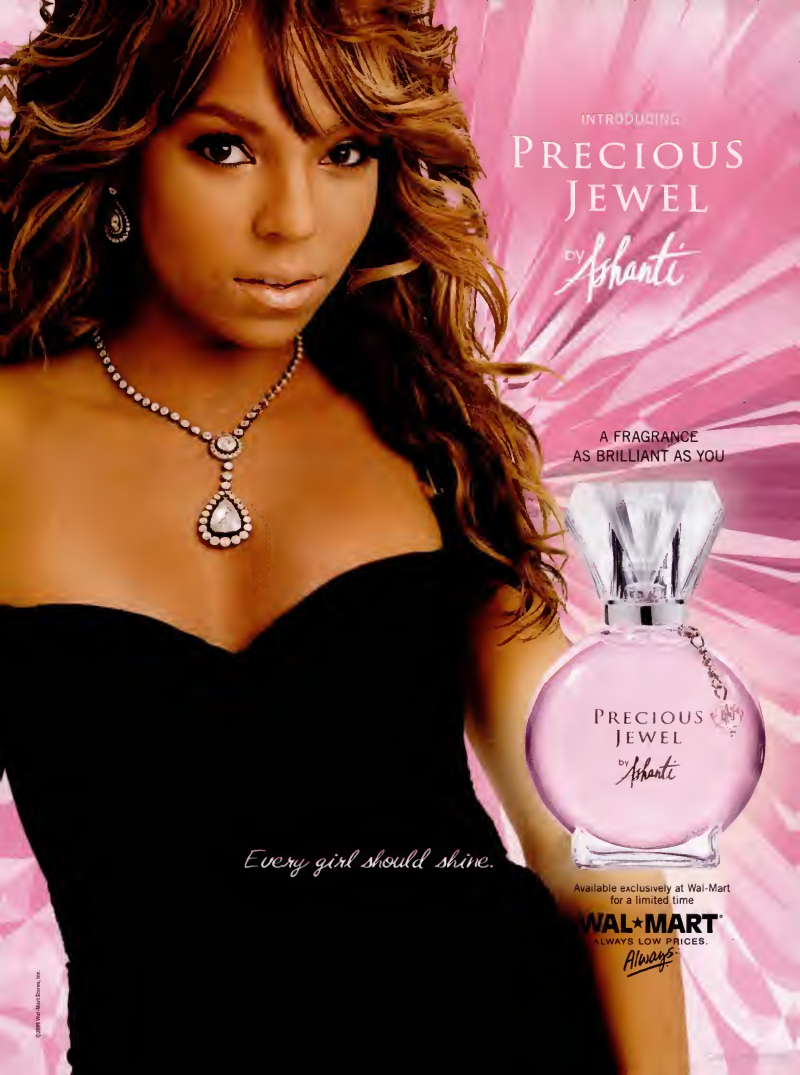
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LUTHER VANDROSS, 1951-2005

Remembering Luther

Craig Seymour deserves a standing ovation for his article on Luther Vandross ["Power of Love," October 2005]. I'm 22 years old, and I don't know every Luther song, but after reading the story, I felt like I knew everything about him. I couldn't help reading some of the lines over and over. If I came across a song title I was familiar with, I would sing the words. Craig's experience with Luther really touched me and made me realize the impact Luther had on people and music. Now I know why he was so loved and why he will be so missed.

Frances C., St. Albans, N.Y.

Thank you so much for putting the late great Luther Vandross on your cover. Luther was truly a legend, and while we may miss his golden voice, he is now in heaven with other angels like Marvin Gaye, Aaliyah, Sam Cooke, Barry White, and Ray Charles.

Eric Isaac
Washington, D.C.

The article on Luther Vandross gave me insight into Luther the human being. People mostly saw him as creating baby-making music, but he was so much bigger than that! When I hear a Luther song, it's a breath of fresh air.

Larry Fellows III
St. Louis, Mo.

I would like to say thank you to the writer of the Luther article. It was a beautiful piece honoring a truly beautiful human being. I was holding back the tears while I was on a plane going home. I was a teen in the early '80s, and every Luther song brings back fond memories. Rest in peace Luther, and thank you for the memories!

Michael Gomez
Saginaw, Mich.

I was happy to see your cover story on Luther Vandross. As a DJ, every time I play one of his tracks, warmness soothes the crowd. As a songwriter, he is an iconic inspiration who lifts my heart and gives me the fire to write positive music. It was also great to see him get props from so many other talented singers, producers, and artists.

Darry Cole
Newcastle, England

What a great cover story of Luther Vandross—Uncle Luther is what I call him. This issue will go alongside my other two favorites: Aaliyah and Left Eye. My only wish is that the stories on each of our talented heroes would have been longer.

L. Hall
Paterson, N.J.

When I walked by a newsstand and saw the picture of Luther Vandross on the cover, it brought a smile to my face. Thanks for probably being the first magazine to do a tribute to the greatest R&B singer that ever lived. I will cherish this issue along with other memorabilia I've collected over the years.

Lillian Figueroa
Hackensack, N.J.

Beat It

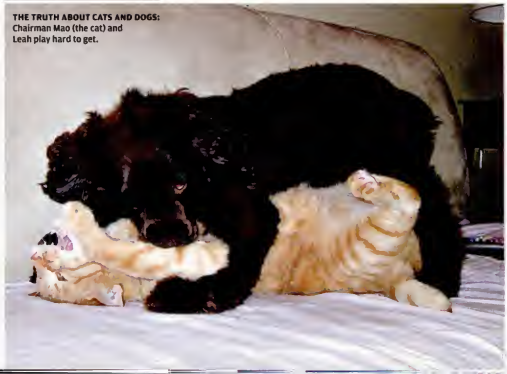
I'm disappointed with your coverage of the Michael Jackson trial ["Wanna Be Startin' Something?" October 2005]. Instead of facts, you had baseless commentaries from Michael Eric Dyson and Chuck D. It would've helped if the public was better informed about what happened in court.

Santa Sierra
Worcester, Mass.

I read the viewpoints on Michael Jackson from the nutty professor and rapper Chuck D. As usual, Chuck D was on point, but when the professor started talking about Michael's skin color, I lost interest imme-

YOUR BEST SHOT

CHRISTINE CHUNG, NEW YORK, N.Y.



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1 oz Coconut Juice

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diately. What does his skin color have to do with the trial? And why didn't you take a chance on doing an investigation? All this negativity I sense from VIBE about MJ is not good. You cannot be connected to the urban community and bash, or have the writers bash, Michael.

Belinda Okeke
Philadelphia, Pa.

G.I. Jane

I had mixed feelings about Olivia even before reading your story ["Sole Sister," by Lola Ogunnaike, October 2005]. I felt her fame was pointless, as well as her singing. She has yet to prove her abilities, but I thought I just might go out and get her album...if it ever comes out. Now I'm even more doubtful about her. The writer tried to make Olivia into a goody-goody, which we know is not true. She signed to such a notorious group, and therefore, inherited enemies.

O. Wami
Hawthorne, Calif.

The Olivia interview was informative because it allowed me to understand why she was a one-hit wonder with "Bizounce." Now that she's with G Unit, though, I feel like she's more of a background extra than an artist. Either way, it's good to see her singing again.

Keisha Chung
Jamaica, N.Y.

Planet Rock

I really enjoyed your article "Fear of a Punk Planet" [by Tony Green, October 2005], I'm a white punk girl raised in a black neighborhood, so I can relate to James Spooner's difficulties. Punks are exiled from every other group in society, so they embrace each other, regardless of race, religion, background, or culture. Also, it was an extra treat to see the fashion layout merging hip hop with skater punk styles.

Elizabeth Crawford, aka Blue
Quincy, Fla.

Wow, you have come far! When I first saw the interview on James Spooner I thought, Uh-oh, they're gonna dissect and make fun of the genre. But I'm so glad I gave the article a chance.

Being an 18-year-old black female punk rocker, I can definitely feel James's pain: not belonging to a certain group and not being accepted by my own people. It was so nice to discover more of my people who actually have the brains to realize that society's definition of being black can be limiting, wrong, and evil. I appreciate you guys running this story and making me feel like I'm not alone.

Myra Holloway
Milwaukee, Wis.

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Please send letters to VIBE MAIL, 215 Lexington Avenue, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10016, or e-mail *vibe@vibe.com*. Send photos to VIBE, Your Best Shot (same address). Or e-mail digital images at 300 dpi to *vibe@vibe.com*. Include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. **All photos must include photographer's name and contact information.** Photos become the property of VIBE and will not be returned.

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Send us your best poetry or lyrics in **90 words or less** on the next topic of **"jealousy"** to **sayword@vibe.com**, and you may see it here. Make sure you include your name, song or poem title, and a contact number. Check out this **"good vs. evil"** poem by Naqwain Johnson of Malone, N.Y.

I lay in the shadows and wait humbly / Battle fear in your heart and uncertainty / Live next to those who also turned backward / Evil was a stranger, but good asked for attention / So who do I choose: the tight suit or baggy jeans? / Play in my riches? Or cry in poverty? / That's evil and good for you / Both sound like demons so I try to stay in between / Don't know my next move / But these obstacles go further than my dreams / Next stop: heaven or hell

ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLENE POTTS; MASE, DJ CENT: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE;

SPEAK UP

> Last month we asked: **What are your thoughts on Mase joining G Unit? Does it compromise his moral standing as a minister?** And you said:

Hell yes! Mase himself said in his book that when it comes to Christianity, you can't be half and half. As a teacher, the Bible holds him to a higher standard (he knows this). He has lost all street and moral cred with me. I'll pray for him, though.

Carey
Nashville, Tenn.

Yes, it does compromise his standing as a minister. Mase is spiritually disconnected and confused, like many of us today. G Unit has nothing to offer people other than entertainment through their music and beefs. Why would Mase join company like that?

Veronica
Durham, N.C.

Not necessarily. He could be trying to bring a Christian aspect to the G Unit, but I highly doubt it. I have no problem with the G Unit, but they're not out for the greater good. Mase would do a lot better getting with someone like Kanye, because he makes music about more than how to stunt.

Phil
Greensboro, N.C.

Mase has disgraced us all. His time has passed, and there's no turning back. I think he'll be hurting G Unit.

Michelle
Bronx, N.Y.

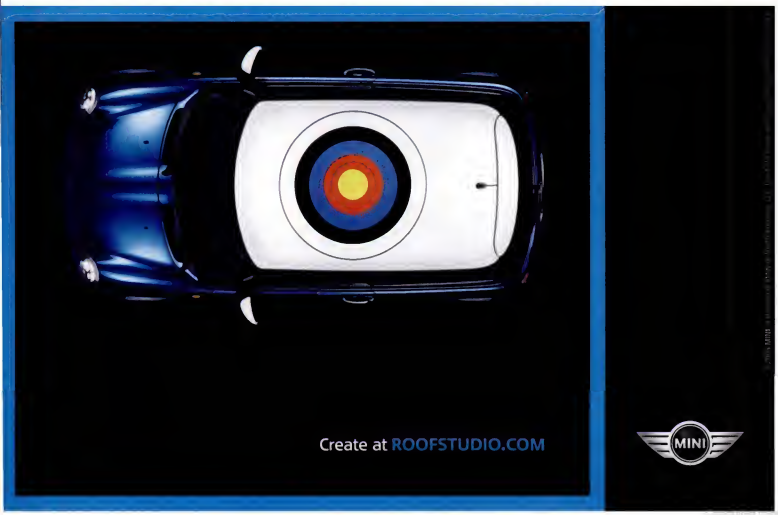
I think Mase is confused. He found the Lord when it was

convenient for him. Mase was never a true minister from the jump, and he just did what he had to do to eat.

Nataki
Lauderhill, Fla.

Mase joining G Unit is great because he adds to the talent that's there. I don't think it compromises him as a minister. Just because he's with G Unit doesn't mean he's going to change.

Jordan
Wilmington, Del.



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11/15 CARBONDALE, IL
11/17 ATLANTA, GA
11/18 GREENSBORO, NC
11/19 STATESBORO, GA
11/20 BIRMINGHAM, AL
11/22 OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
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11/12 Winston Salem State
11/14 Hampton
11/15 North Carolina Central/VA Union
11/16 Norfolk
11/18 NC A&T State

Note: Remaining dates listed. Yardfest scheduled at select schools.

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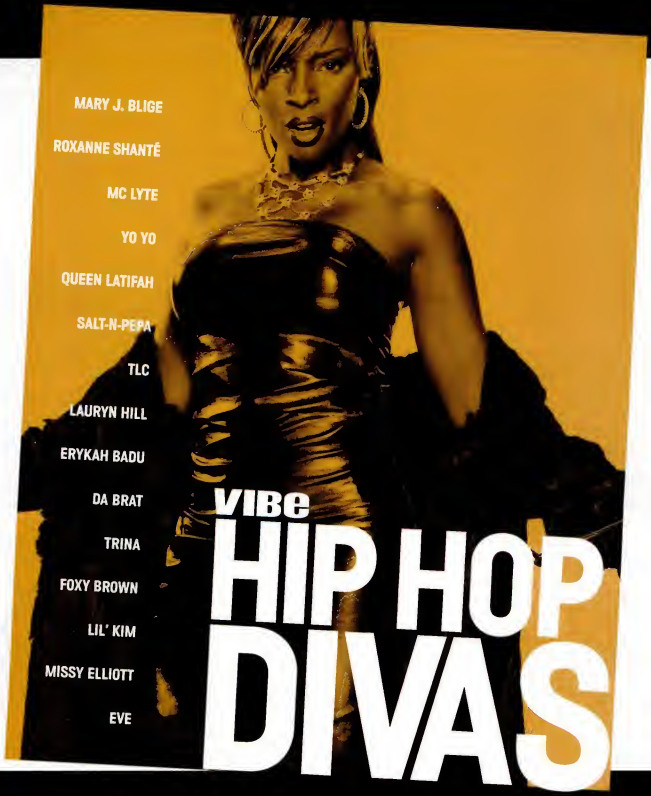

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SHOW YOU HOW TO DO THIS

Rappers' shoe games have long influenced consumers, but now hip hop is changing the rules for marketing athletic footwear. **BY PAUL FARBER**

Since Run-DMC got seven figures to rock the three stripes after the success of "My Adidas," the hip hop and sneaker industries have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. But sports and brand power pretty much dominated the marketing picture while hip hop mostly played the sidelines. Nowadays, however, it takes more than the association with athletic prowess—remember "It's Gotta Be the (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Illustration by **ANTHONY FREDA**

Shoes?"—to persuade people to spend their scrilla on the newest kicks. Folks want that MC flair, too. Moreover, shoe companies are increasingly adopting hip hop marketing strategies to blow up new products.

Whether it's using street teams, product giveaways, poster boards, or strategic release dates, buzz is being created for shoes just as it is for music releases. "50 Cent came in the game as the mixtape king. Every kid knew who he was before any advertising," says Que Gaskins, global VP of lifestyle/entertainment marketing for Reebok, the backers for G Unit footwear. "It would be foolish for us not to take a look at some of those tactics." So now you see Nike throwing LeBron James sneaker-release parties and Pony hiring L.A. graffiti

Shoe companies are adopting hip hop marketing strategies.

artist DUCE to design a Snoop Dogg mural.

There's no disputing that athlete-endorsed kicks still make up the bulk of the $16.4 billion U.S. sneaker industry. But companies have clearly become more deft at insinuating hip hop into the world of athletic competition. Think about Jordan's Jumpman or S. Carter's basketball shoes, made by Nike and Reebok respectively, which advertise sneakers as the cornerstone of a life that encompasses both music and sports—with pro ballers like Kenyon Martin and Jamal Crawford even wearing S. Carters during games. "These companies now understand the intersection of athletic, entertainment, and fashion products in the culture," says Erik Smith, an executive at Philadelphia's Critical Mass Consulting, which specializes in hip hop commerce. In this new sports marketing world, it seems like you either slang raps or got a wicked jump shot. Is the day coming when spitting rhymes will sell more kicks than being an NBA star? It does seem that, now, more kids would rather swagger like a rapper than a ballplayer. That might not bode so well for the future of U.S. Olympic basketball, but if the paper keeps stacking, neither G Unit nor Shawn Carter—not to mention Nike, Reebok, or Adidas—will be complaining.

10 THINGS I'VE LEARNED BY SHARISSA

1 Even if you look sexy and have all the marketing in the world, it's really about good music.

2 Don't be greedy. One time I did a drug run. I got on that bus and saw this lady I didn't know, and she kept looking at me. I was scared to death. That was enough for me, 'cause I really didn't have to do it—it was excessive.

3 Thuggin' ain't just in the street, it's in everything you do. Although I wouldn't date either, doctors and lawyers thug it out every day doing their jobs.

4 Do less talking and more listening.

5 It's best to borrow clothes, since you can't be seen in the same outfit twice. Let the designers loan me clothes to wear one time 'cause I'm not spending my paper on that. I'll save my money and invest in some property.

6 You *are* the people you hang with. So make sure the crew that you choose got your back.

7 I toured Rikers Island and saw pregnant women having babies in jail. Ain't none of us better than no one else, 'cause that could've been me in there.

8 Dudes who are tough on TV ain't really tough. Maybe they're tough to y'all, but they ain't tough to me. 'Cause I know so much shit about them. A lot of them be gay.

NO HALF-STEPPIN': Sharissa always tells it like it is.

9 Don't get caught up in the industry. If you get too emotional, they'll eat you up.

10 Make sure you know who you fucking with. A dude tried to show he loved me by putting an AK-47 in his mouth. Nigga, you don't love me, you scare me. What if he pulled the trigger, and I saw his brains everywhere. He could've killed himself and fucked up my life.

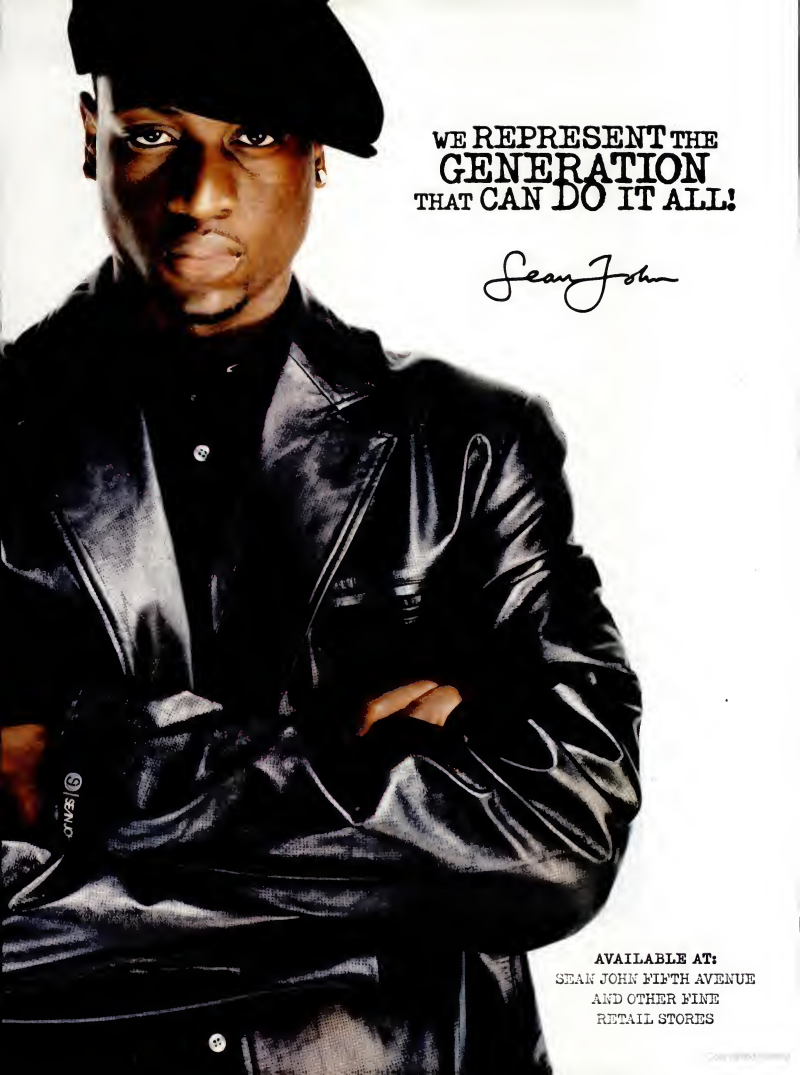
SLANGUISTICS

Draped up: v. To wear expensive or flashy jewelry or clothing. Bun B flosses hard on "Draped Up," which features a sample of Lil' Keke (from "Pimp tha Pen") rapping on the hook, "Draped up and dripped out, know what I'm talkin' 'bout?" Meanwhile, Three 6 Mafia's DJ Paul brags, "I keep my shit in control, draped up in diamonds and gold," on Gangsta Boo's "Where Dem Dollas At."

SHARISSA: MICHAEL LAVINE

RUNNING NUMBERS: PEEP THE MATHEMATICS. **70:** TIMES USHER SINGS THE WORD "YEAH" ON HIS SINGLE "YEAH!" **24:** TIMES YOUNG JEEZY AD-LIBS THE WORD "YEAH" ON "SOUL SURVIVOR." **94:** NUMBER OF NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY MEMBERS WHO VOTED FOR LEGALIZING PRIOR SENTENCES UNDER THE ROCKEFELLER DRUG LAWS (43 VOTED NAY).

Illustration by BOB ECKSTEIN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MINORITY REPORT

Cartoon Network's Adult Swim's new series *MINORITEAM* features an outrageously stereotyped superhero crew that fights discrimination. Here, the show's writers imagine what kind of affirmative action the team would take to fight racially charged everyday scenarios.

> EL JEFE: A day laborer who gets his power from the Leafblower 3000. It can suck and blow, allowing him to fly or rip holes in time and space.
Alter ego: Richard F. Cartin, a powerful oil magnate
VIBE: What if you discovered one of your high-powered friends was exploiting illegal immigrant labor?
Qué? Exploding the immigrants? We are peaceful people. We don't blow things up. You are crazy, amigo! I think perhaps you like to drink too much cerveza. No más, amigo.

> JEWCANO: Possesses all the powers of the Jewish faith and a volcano
Alter ego: Neil Horwitz, a lazy mailroom employee
What would you say if a Christian zealot got in your face after seeing *The Passion of the Christ* and called you a Christ-killer?
What is this movie *The Passion*? I have not seen it. But Fasto took me to see *Blacula*. What a movie! Very clever idea. You see, he's Count Dracula, but he is black. We are going to see *Black Frankenstein* next week.

> FASTO: The fastest man ever
Alter ego: Landon K. Dutton, a women's studies professor
What would you do if you were pulled over and you suspected racial profiling?
I'd try to relate to him on a professional level: Sir, I understand you have a job to do, and while I respect that—Smack! I slap the white devil upside the head and use my superfast speed to get out of there. I'm on some beach chillin' before the first piece of evidence is planted. Ya dig?

> DR. WANG:
Wheelchair-bound human calculator and the leader of the Minoriteam
Alter ego: He runs a Laundromat, which is the team's headquarters.
What would you do if your Asian girlfriend left you for a white man?
Math is Wang's lady. You have never know love like sweet rapture solving math problem in less than minute. The supple angles of triangles and beauty of sphere. It truly is, Wangderful! Now you leave me. Wang need private time with Wang.

> NON-STOP:
Impervious to bullets and known as "the man who can't be shot"
Alter ego: Dave Raj, who has been shot many times while working at his father's convenience store
What would you do if a crew of teens tried to shoplift from your father's store?
I have no time for such questions! If you are not going to buy something from store, you must leave! I am not joking you, my friend. I will introduce you to the gods TASER and Louisville Slugger. They are merciless gods.
Justin Monroe

BETWEEN THE LINES

"Steven Seagal, I used to love his karate / But even he snitched, he told on Peter Gotti."—"Tattle Teller," Tony Yayo

When the feds mounted another legal assault against the Gotti-led Gambino crime family in 2002, they used pony-tailed action movie star Steven Seagal to bolster their case. Seagal helped confirm the indictments of several men, including the Dapper Don's brother, Peter, testifying that codefendants Anthony Ciccone and Julius Nasso (a former Seagal producer and partner) had tried to extort millions of dollars from him. But Seagal may not have been whistle clean himself. He acknowledged going to a mobster for protection first, instead of the FBI, and only testified after receiving immunity from prosecutors.
Paul Farber

GEORGE KRAVCHYK

8: YEARS SINCE NAS, FOXY BROWN, AZ, AND NATURE COLLABORATED TO RELEASE *THE FIRM*. **35:** NUMBER OF DOGS IN DJ HOUSES AT JOS BREEDING BUSINESS, PITFALL KENNELS. **6:** NUMBER OF TIMES BIZZY BONE SAID "PRAISE GAWD" DURING A BIZARRE 10-MINUTE APPEARANCE ON A HOUSTON RADIO STATION THIS PAST APRIL.

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VIBe GAME CLUB

NC's Little Brother members—Phonte, Big Pooh, and 9th Wonder—reveal the strengths (and weaknesses) of their game.

Q: What games should your Little Brother should never beat you at?

A: Big Pooh: Never Ever, EVER lose to Big Pooh in **Tekken**, I'm not good at all. Or **MLB '05** on **PS2.**

Q: What games will Little Brother stomp you on?

A: Phonte: Tekken 5; Mortal Kombat; Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus; The Suffering; God Of War— "This is my favorite, because it's based on Greek mythology, the graphics are incredible. It sets the bar high for other games on PS2."

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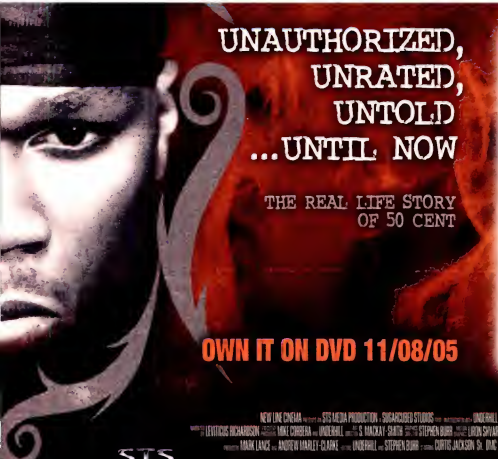

A TOUCH OF CLASS

The **FIELD MOB** boys are just a pair of Georgia rappers with bad table manners and rough edges. Can a day at etiquette school transform them from ashy to classy?

Say it, don't spray it.

Over my head.

Training day.

Get your weight up.

Can I keep the props?" Shawn Jay shouts to no one in particular while swinging around an unopened bottle of cabernet. "What are we learnin' about anyway? Table manners? We're hungry!" Although he's eager to quiet his rumbling stomach, today's about more than breaking bread. Shawn and his partna Smoke are preparing for the release of their third CD, *Light Poles and Pine Trees*, so VIBE is lending a hand to their press campaign by pairing the duo with an etiquette coach. Angelo Ellerbee is a modern-day Emily Post. He's played Henry Higgins to everyone from Mary J. Blige to Big Daddy Kane. After a quick meet-and-greet at Ellerbee's Double XXposure office in New York City, Field Mob is put on its best behavior.

> Clean Up Your Act:

"It's important that you always come out looking fresh," Ellerbee says while eyeing the six hairs sprouting from Shawn's chin.

The boys apply beauty products aggressively. Shawn soaks his braids with a can of hair sheen, and the aerosol suffocates everyone in the room. Next, he tries on a new scent, but he's more liberal with the cologne than the city of Amsterdam is with weed.

"I'm spraying it all over myself before I go to the club," Shawn says. Ellerbee coughs for a minute and then opts to move on.

> The Food

Ellerbee sits the boys down in front of fancy place settings and begins explaining the utensils. "There's the salad fork, dinner fork, and then the butter knife," he says.

The boys couldn't care less. Smoke's salad ends up all over the tablecloth. Meanwhile, Shawn sticks his knife through a piece of fish and bangs it against his plate.

"I just want to eat," Shawn whines. "We don't do the formal, 12-course dinner thing." Ellerbee excuses the starving pair from the table before they can break his fine china.

Mic check.

> 21 Questions

When it comes to interview techniques, "Showing up is the first rule," Ellerbee says firmly. His other media rules include: Find something in common with your interviewer, be complimentary, and kill haters with kindness. "Never let anyone break down what you've said," he says. "Don't give them anything negative."

A mock Q&A pits Field Mob against Ellerbee, who impersonates an antagonistic reporter. Even when he compares a Field Mob concert to a high school talent show, they respond with clichéd compliments. The duo wins this showdown, proving that, sometimes, good etiquette is just good acting.

> The Workout Plan:

"Usually we have artists do some type of physical training," Ellerbee says. This lesson doesn't last very long.

"I bet you I can do 100 push-ups!" Smoke blurts out before ripping off his sweater and button-down. Ellerbee calls his bluff. After only 23 reps, Smoke collapses on the floor. After a handful of sit-ups, Shawn meets the same fate. "Close enough," Ellerbee says.

Tired, hungry, and slightly better behaved, Field Mob graduates with a passing grade. Barely. *Chris Yuscavage*

STYLING BY SARYSSA PHILLIPS/OSHARE STYLEZ; HAIR BY NICOLE TUCKER

6: NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO THEY HOPE BE THE RAP CITY'S THE MAYOR: CHRIS THOMAS, JOE CLAIR, BIG LEZ, TIGER B, MAD LINX AND J-NICE. **15:** YEARS *RAP CITY* HAS BEEN ON THE AIR. **100:** REPORTED LENGTH (IN FEET) OF PRODUCER SCOTT STORCH'S MUSCLE CARS—SO LONG HE HAS TO PARK IT AT HIS MIAMI HOME.

Photographs by **LUKE BARBER-SMITH**

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I CAN MAKE YOU FAMOUS

ARTIST MANAGER Gaby Acevedo supervises every aspect of his clients' careers and makes sure they will not lose.

As president of SRC Records, Gaby Acevedo really wanted the label to sign reggaeton superstar Tego Calderón. But when a deal couldn't be worked out, the 29-year-old Bronx native started managing Calderón himself. He helped get Tego signed to Atlantic Records using contacts built from 10 years of experience in various facets of the music industry, including handling East Coast radio promotions for the now defunct Loud Records. While Acevedo still holds down his executive duties at SRC, which features artists like David Banner and Akon, he also earns a 10 to 15 percent management fee for guiding the career of one of reggaeton's biggest stars. Now *that's* making some noise.

PRESIDENTIAL... Gaby Acevedo makes power moves for his clientele by...

...traveling to speak with label executives...

> MY RESPONSIBILITIES:

I do everything from making decisions about album artwork to deciding what records are going to make the album to picking the single. I book all the shows, and because of the way Tego's deal with Atlantic is structured, he pays for his own travel. So I book all the flights, hotels, and any car service. When we're doing shows, I'm contacting dancers, the hype man, and the DJ.

> MY 9-TO-5:

I get up around 8 a.m. Then I'm setting up everything from photo shoots to interviews and meeting with the head of A&R to find out what he thinks of the album. Right now, we have to hand in the album, so I'm making sure everything's straight with mastering and mixing. The day never really ends, though, because Tego will call me at three in the morning to play me a record.

...meeting with product managers...

...helping artists like Tego Calderón choose the right look...

> SKILLS NECESSARY:

You've got to be able to return calls to the label immediately, because they need answers about things like radio station visits and sample clearances. You have to be very organized and handle pressure. At the end of the day, it falls on you as a manager—you're the guy to blame.

> THE WORST PART OF THE JOB:

You have to get producer and featured-artist agreements signed for every producer and guest artist on an album. But when you reach out to them, they say to just call their lawyer. Then you call their lawyer, and they won't return the call for a minute, or we can't get a hold of them, or they don't agree to the terms. It's just a lot of back and forth.

> WHY IT'S ALL WORTH IT:

It's just knowing that your artist knows you're here to make him or her win. It took Tego a long time to trust me, and now that he does, when I make decisions for him, he really doesn't second guess me.

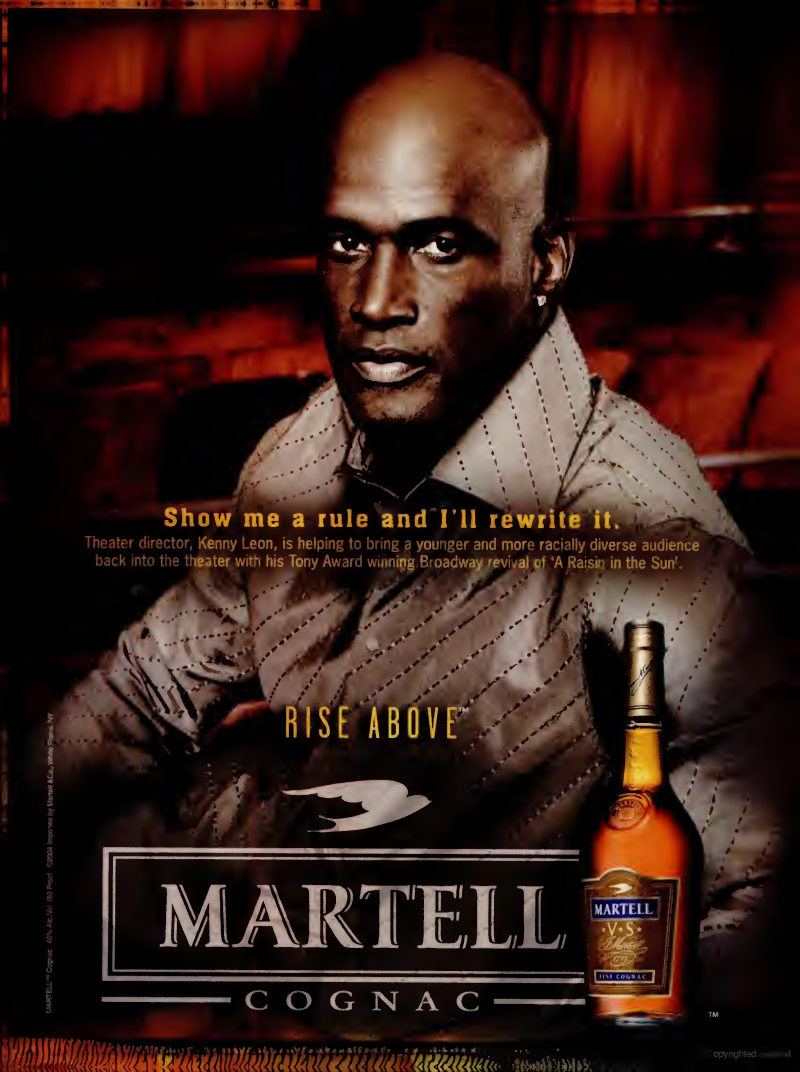
...and always taking care of every detail.

> MY ADVICE ON GETTING IN THE GAME:

First off, find talent; it can be anywhere from showcases to buying aspiring rappers' CDs in the streets to word of mouth. If you're not in the industry yet, persuade potential clients by saying that your world will revolve around them. Once you actually have some clients, realize that this is a 24-hour job. Whenever they have a problem, they're going to call you. What you might think is a little problem might be a big problem to them, so you still have to find a way to solve it. *Jesse Erenberg*

100: [illegible] **130:** [illegible] **200:** NUMBER OF TUNES STRUMMED ON MARIA'S ESCUELITA GUITAR **13:** LENGTH, IN SECONDS, OF MUSIC SEGMENT DJ GREEN LANTERN PRODUCED FOR AN EPISODE OF HBO'S *ENTOURAGE*

Photographs by **CHARLOTTE DAVIS**



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COME FLY WITH ME

With God as her bodyguard, **CECE WINANS** continues trying to bring light to the youth.

RAISE YOUR SIGHTS: Winans worries that music-video "filth" harms young viewers.

CeCe Winans took a leap of faith when she went her own way after four years of performing with older brother BeBe as a Grammy-winning gospel duo. But the risk paid off when her first solo album, 1995's Alone in His Presence, *eventually won a Grammy and was certified platinum. A decade later, the 41-year-old married mother of two is still on top of the gospel game. Despite the painful loss in June of her brother Ronald, she has persevered, releasing* Purified, *her seventh solo album, and planning a reunion with BeBe.*

I never wanted to sing on my own, but Ronald really pushed me. He was always my greatest encourager, and losing him was one of the toughest things I've had to deal with in my life. It's strange, because his death was both amazing and sad. Ronald died smiling so hard I could see his dimples. I miss him so much, but his death made me realize how to love harder and better and also to put everything in perspective.

I've felt an urge to give back to the next generation, because we have to put a stop to the madness and encourage our girls to love themselves. *Purified* has love songs, prayer songs, and songs about life. At the same time, it's telling you about life in God's eyes and what's pleasing to him. It breaks my heart to see music videos about sex, multiple partners, and people with no clothes on. Music is such a powerful thing, so why does it have to be associated with filth? It's having a very negative impact on the kids who are watching because they're imitating it. I take responsibility for having a platform to help young women change their lives. They have it a thousand times harder than I did, especially with peer pressure and low self-esteem issues. I'm going to make sure to continue helping young women change their lives because God has put it in my heart to do that.

As for the reunion with BeBe, I believe it's going to happen real soon. We never meant for so much time to go by, but we got real busy doing our separate things, and especially when dealing with different companies, it's not as easy to come back together because different contracts and tour schedules are involved. But hopefully, we'll do a reunion tour soon. *Baria A. Razzaq*

WE ARE FAMILY

The Winans aren't the first sibling act ever, but they're one of the most famous. Here are some other prominent and not-so-prominent musical clans.

CLIPSE

Family name: Gene "Malice" and Terrence "Pusha T" Thornton

Family jewels: Clipse were grindin' before meeting the Neptunes, but the 'Tunes gave them that uncut dope.

Family recipe: Their music and selling drugs seemed to be one in the same.

HARLEM WORLD

Family name: Mason "Mase" and Stason "Baby Stase" Betha

Family jewels: Mase tried to spread love to his twin sister and crew. Unfortunately, consumers didn't care.

Family recipe: When he couldn't double up, Mase turned to God's people.

TRU

Family name: Corey "C-Murder," Percy "Master P," and Vyshonne "Silkk" Miller

Family jewels: When it comes to family, Master P's 'bout it, 'bout it.

Family recipe: Times may have changed, but their music still makes them say "Uungh!"

HANSON

Family name: Taylor, Zac, and Isaac Hanson

Family jewels: Three blond Christians whose sugary smash "MMMBop" could satisfy Willy Wonka.

Family recipe: Thanks to Hanson, the world won't forget Soul for Real's greatness. *Justin Monroe*

WINANS: KWAKU ALSTON

7.4: AUDIENCE MEMBERS IN MILLYONG WHO WERE TUNED INTO [illegible] GISH RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA BY DECLARING "GEORGE BUSH DOESN'T CARE ABOUT BLACK PEOPLE." **9.99:** PRICE (IN [illegible])

BOBBITO PLAYS THE TRACKS. **DAMIAN "JR. GONG" MARLEY** STATES THE FACTS.

To be perfectly honest, I asked Damian what "Jamrock" meant, and I prefaced it with, "I know this is a stupid question...." He explained that Jamrock is Jamaica (of course), and he wasn't the least bit condescending. I know my peoples from the Caribbean can be laid-back, but this dude is *real* laid-back. I appreciated the vibe, considering he's busy with the release of his new LP, *Welcome to Jamrock*, his tour, and well, just being the youngest son of Bob Marley.

> Ini Kamoze—"World a Music" (1983)

D: Ini Kamoze. I remember hearing this song at a concert as a teenage youth. From that night, I loved it bad, bad, bad, and I didn't hear that sound again until I searched for it for "Jamrock."

B: How difficult was it to go back and find out who it was?

D: I knew who it was, but I didn't have my hands on a copy.

B: Are you cool with Ini?

D: All blessings. I saw him at Sumfest.

> Jah Cure—"Longing For" (2005)

B: Beautiful record.

D: That was recorded from prison. Jah Cure is a star, but he's in an unfortunate situation.

B: I didn't know they let you do that.

D: He has unique tone, very soulful and emotional. I feel what he's saying. A lot of singers have good tone, but they haven't found themselves yet artistically.

> Quantic & Nickodemus, feat. Tempo & the Candela Allstars— "Mi Swing es Tropical" (2005)

D: When the vocals come in, it reminds me of the Gypsy Kings. I listened to them when I was younger and enjoyed their harmonies.

B: The horns remind me of early ska music.

D: Yeah! That, too.

B: The phrasing is very staccato, and the tempo is upbeat. It's Afro-Cuban rhythm with a soulful house beat underneath, and it's been tearing up every dance floor I spin at.

> KRS-ONE "Sound of da Police" (1993)

D: KRS wicked! I listened to this when it came out. Respect to all reggae-influenced soul music. Sounds like Mos Def and Busta Rhymes got the phrase "Watch Out!" from this song.

B: He laid the blueprint for many artists who came after him. Mad original for his time.

PLAYING "THE WALL: Bobbito and Damian get up, stand up.

2: BUSINESSES (ROC-A-FELLA RECORDS AND ROCAWEAR CLOTHING) DAMON DASH HAS RELINQUISHED IN THE PAST YEAR TO FORMER PARTNER JAY-Z. **2:** [illegible] **1.3:** ESTIMATED EARNINGS (IN MILLIONS) MADE BY JIM JONES FROM SALES OF HIS DEBUT ALBUM, *ON MY WAY TO CHURCH*, AS OF AUGUST 2005.

Photograph by **MATTHEW SALACUSE**

LICK SHOTS

You already know the **YOUNGBLOODZ** don't give a damn. So we asked the Atlanta drankin' patnaz to tell us what's presidential among the holiday season's biggest blockbusters—based only on the trailers. Salute!

POPCORN LOVE: Are the YoungBloodZ (J-Bo, left, and Sean Paul) the next Ebert & Roeper?

> *ZATHURA*

Sean Paul: Is this really coming out? What the hell is they thinking 'bout, man?
J-Bo: They did too much.
S: Some damn meteors start coming through the house. What is that?
J: *Jumanji* was better 'cause it had Robin Williams, but he probably didn't wanna do this bullshit.
S: He might be glad. You saved yourself on that one, man.
RATING:

> *BIG MOMMA'S HOUSE 2*

S: The first one wasn't the funniest shit in the world, but this look mo' funny.
J: When Martin does his characters like Roscoe and Sheneneh, he funny as hell.
S: The bathing suit killed it, man. Last time he had a dress, but now he in the goddamn bathing suit.
J: He and Jamie Foxx should do a movie together, with all them damn characters they be doing.
RATING:

> *HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE*

J: I ain't know they still making Harry Potters.
S: Harry Potter look old as hell now. That nigga got a license, and he driving.
J: He like a wizard. It's cool, but it ain't nothing I'd pay to see.
S: People are having unprotected sex everywhere, so with all these damn kids out there, this shit'll probably sell.
RATING:

> *FUN WITH DICK & JANE*

J: Jim Carrey a funny cat, man.
S: That man makes $20 million a movie, so he ain't gonna bring no bullshit.
J: They was robbing a coffee shop, and old girl slid over the counter. That shit was funny.
S: I'm messing with Jim Carrey.
J: I'm foolish, so I wanna see some foolish shit.
RATING:

> *KING KONG*

J: A long-ass trailer to get to nothing. I like the original better. But I like the little, short, fat dude (Jack Black). It was too many fake-ass animals. In the old *King Kong*, there wasn't no big giant bugs.
S: They coulda spent some of that money on me.
J: Hell, yeah. I woulda came down that mo'fucka and died first.
RATING:

> *THE NEW WORLD*

S: This is boring as hell. It reminds me of Social Studies.
J: It needs some violence.
S: It looked like the Indians were gonna whup some ass for a minute, but then it seemed like they were kicking it with the pilgrims.
J: I also seen a dude that had on some armor. I'm like, What is it really about?
S: They shoulda named the movie "Thanksgiving."
RATING:

R.A. the Rugged Man

LOCATION: MAGIC JOHNSON HARLEM THEATER

35,000: COST (IN DOLLARS) OF A DIAMOND-ENCRUSTED SONY PSP CASE. **1.7:** FIRST WEEK SALES (IN MILLIONS OF UNITS) OF EA SPORTS'S *MADDEN NFL 06*, THE BIGGEST OPENING WEEK HAUL IN THE FRANCHISE'S HISTORY. **1.1:** FIRST WEEK SALES (IN MILLIONS OF UNITS) OF 50 CENT'S *THE MASSACRE*—THE HIGHEST FOR A HIP HOP RELEASE SO FAR THIS YEAR.

Photograph by **JORDAN HOLLENDER**

Sean John

ACCESSORIES

SEAN JOHN FIFTH AVENUE AND OTHER FINE RETAIL STORES

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PICK YOUR SHOT

1. He just saw someone's...ay! **KAINE** of the Ying Yang Twins discovers what D-Roc was mumbling about on "Wait (The Whisper Song)," at Miami Beach's Shore Club.
2. Taster's choice: A yummy **CHRISTINA MILIAN** and **YUMMY BINGHAM** look good enough to eat at the BMI Urban Awards in Miami Beach.
3. "Yo, Phat Farm got them 'George Bush Doesn't Care About Black People' T-shirts on sale now," **RUSSELL SIMMONS** tells **CHRIS ROCK** at S.O.S (Saving Ourselves): The BET Relief Telethon in New York.
4. Between a rock and a, er, hot place? **SCOTT STORCH** (center) with **PARIS HILTON** and **ROCKWILDER** at the MTV Video Music Awards in Miami.
5. **USHER** even gets the fellas wet as **JERMAINE DUPRI** takes a dive at a pre-VMA bash hosted by MTV.
6. Is that Ms. Fat Booty? Nah, it's just **MOS DEF** and his new wife at John Singleton's VMA party.
7. Move weight like Oprah, son! A diesel **TIMBALAND** and trim **NELLY FURTADO** show off their bodies at the VMAs.
8. **JOE SIMPSON** has no idea that **LIL JON** is thinking about his daughter Jessica in those Daisy Dukes, at the producer's VMA party at the Shore Club.
9. This woman's work is never done: Not even **KIMORA LEE SIMMONS** can convince **MAXWELL** to put out an album, backstage at Baby Phat's Fashion Week show at Radio City Music Hall in N.Y.C.

L. 2, 8: RAY TAMARRA; 3, 4, 5, 6: JOHNNY NUÑEZ/WIRELIZZPHOTO.COM; 7: JULIA REVERIU; 9: COLLEEN/FAMILESS RECORDS

5: NUMBER OF RADIO STATIONS CLEAR CHANNEL HAS CONVERTED TO HURBAN (HISPANIC AND URBAN) FORMAT SINCE THE RISE OF REGGAETON. **12:** AGE GINUWINE BEGAN PERFORMING AT WASHINGTON, D.C., CLUBS AS PART OF THE HIP-HOP GROUP FINESSE FIVE. **1:** NUMBER OF A-T-EACH THAT LIL' TWIST [illegible]

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FOR THE RECORD

> Suge Knight, 40, was shot in the leg on August 28 in Miami at an MTV Video Music Awards party hosted by Kanye West. Knight is expected to recover fully, but at press time, police had no suspects.... // In its September issue, *Esquire* named **Pharrell Williams,** 32, the "Best-Dressed Man in the World 2005." Kanye West, André 3000, and Jay-Z also made the annual list.... // **Beanie Sigel,** 31, was released from a New Jersey federal prison on August 9. He had been incarcerated on gun and drug charges since October 2004.... // On August 9, a federal jury convicted **Young Turk,** 24, on three felony weapons charges for involvement in a January 2004 shootout with a SWAT team in a Memphis apartment. Turk faces between five and 10 years in prison.... // A bronze statue of **Tupac Shakur** was unveiled at the newly opened Tupac Amaru Shakur Center for the Arts in Stone Mountain, Ga., on September 13, the ninth anniversary of the MC's death. Afeni Shakur, Tupac's mother, attended the ceremony, which featured a performance by kids who attended the Tupac Summer Performing Arts Camp.... // **Tyson Beckford,** 34, filed a $5 million suit against Sean Combs in New York on August 19 claiming that **Diddy** had reneged on hundreds of thousands of dollars due Beckford for his modeling work in Sean Jean campaigns and had used his likeness without authorization after his contract had allegedly expired. Diddy feels a resolution can be reached. "I'm going to make sure we straighten it out," he told *allhiphop.com*.

MAN DOWN: Suge took a bullet in Miami.

THE LOW DOWN ON THE DOWN LOW

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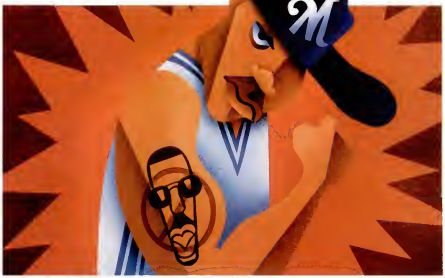

MURDER MASE: Is the pastor beefing with Diddy now?

Before we get to the ever-so-pressing business of dissecting all the absurd details about who slept with who, who's signing to where, and who's wearing whose panties, **VC** ponders the past couple of months in the world. Is it normal that there's beef between Ms. Voletta Wallace and **Diddy,** and beef between **Scott Storch** and **Lil Jon?** We think not....

ROBBING GOD'S PEOPLE

And weirder still, the once pious **Mase** is really all the way back to Murder. **VC** hears that even his new G Unit cohorts are scandalized by Mase's unholy party persona. Multiple ladies getting blessed with the pastor's holy water in one sermon? What about the rumor that Mase is so resentful of Mr. **Diddy** that he threatened to lay hands on him?... And not healing ones, either....

G UNITY?

On to the latest MTV VMAs. **VC** hears that **50 Cent** retaliated against **Diddy** for not naming him during his intro by hugging Diddy's girl, **Kim Porter.** Then supposedly 50 went on to taunt **the Game** and **Jadakiss.** But after Fif's profanity-laced rant onstage, there was one new beef. Allegedly, security rushed G Unit out of the venue so fast they forgot recent signees **Mobb Deep**—leaving a furious **Prodigy** to hitchhike his way back to his hotel. Whatever happened to leave no man behind?...

CAPTAIN SAVE-A-HO

Meanwhile, your dedicated reporter hears producer **Scott Storch** has already spoiled his rumored new "lady," **Paris Hilton,** with $200,000 in diamonds, private jet trips, and luxury hotel suites. Pals worry that Storch will actually go broke chasing Paris.... But remember, all this is very hush-hush and strictly on the QT.

VIBE.COM EXCLUSIVE

LIL' KIM SPEAKS OUT

If the Notorious B.I.G. were still alive, would Lil' Kim be in the slammer? The Queen Bee answers that and more just days before heading off to a New York prison. Log on to *vibe.com* for the full interview.

KNIGHT: JOHNNY NUÑEZ/WIREIMAGE; LIL' KIM: ROGER ERICSSON

2: CITIES (NEW YORK AND TORONTO) USED AS LOCATIONS FOR 50 CENT'S FEATURE FILM, *GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'*. **41:** [illegible] **37.75:** AVERAGE AGE OF REMAINING MEMBERS OF N.W.A (DR. DRE, ICE CUBE, MC REN, AND DJ YELLA). **6:** [illegible]

Illustration by DAVID COWLES

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OUTTA CONTROL

XBOX 360 and **PLAYSTATION 3** will change the game, period.

A notorious man once said, "Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis, when I was dead broke I couldn't picture this." If only he could see us now. Thirty-three years after the first home gaming system hit shelves (Magnavox Odyssey, what up?!), Microsoft and Sony are set to revolutionize the gaming experience, bringing everything from high-speed Internet applications to supercomputer processing capabilities right into your living room. Put another way, things done changed. And if you don't know, now you know... (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

WHAT IT IS: Xbox 360

Xbox remixed. Says Peer Schneider, of game industry authority IGN, "Microsoft took everything that was right about the Xbox and put it on a more powerful machine." Basically, you get an updated CPU—10 times faster than the original system—a new graphics chip, and a 20-gig hard drive in a revved-up box.

WHAT YOU'RE GONNA LOVE: Xbox *Live*. Already the best thing to happen to gaming since the first Nintendo. Microsoft's online service has become bigger and deffer, adding an interactive marketplace, new community features, and video messaging (among other goodies) to the already successful formula. And with the internal hard drive and Windows Media Extender compatibility, you can do everything from ripping music to streaming DVDs. Three USB 2.0 ports and interchangeable faceplates allow for more customization, and, well, that just makes it fly.

WHAT YOU'RE GONNA HATE: Limited backward compatibility. You can play hits like *Halo* and *Madden*, but may have to wait for *NBA Street*. C'mon, *NBA Street*! Can we live?

WHAT YOU'RE GONNA PAY: About $400

WHAT IT IS: PlayStation 3

Unless you're in the Army, this is the fastest computer you've ever seen. The PS3 comes equipped with a "Cell" processor, a Sony/IBM/Toshiba collabo specifically designed for the new PlayStation but set to revolutionize personal computing.

WHAT YOU'RE GONNA LOVE: First of all, say good-bye to annoying load times. This generation, Sony's riding with Blu-ray, a new disc format packing over five times more content than a standard DVD. Coupled with the Cell processor, you finally get a system that never has to stop and think about where you're going next. You also get ramped-up Internet capabilities. With Wi-Fi and Ethernet connectivity, the PS3's online game is tighter than Paul Wall's. And with six USB 2.0 ports and the ability to play games for PlayStation and PS2, this system's got the hook-up for real.

WHAT YOU'RE GONNA HATE: Blu-ray isn't a sure bet. With Hollywood still undecided about the next generation of home entertainment (Blu-ray offers more storage but is facing stiff competition from the alternative HD-DVD), Sony risks dropping a hot machine that'll be quickly left in the cold. Keeping track of Memory Sticks sucks, too.

WHAT YOU'RE GONNA PAY: About $400

THE ONE WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT: Xbox 360, but simply because it's coming out this year. Of course, that doesn't mean we won't also cop the PS3 when it drops next spring. After all, we've got room on our shelves for both, and a player gotta do what a player gotta do. *Jozen Cummings*

Full Circle

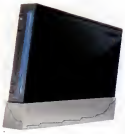
The Xbox 360 doesn't do much without the games. Here are three* early titles to get you rolling.

> *SAINT'S ROW* (THQ, November '05)
Pick up this *GTA*-like third-person action/adventure and get a taste for how incredible sex, drugs, and violence can look when boosted by the system's ramped up graphics chip and Havok 3.1.1 Physics engine. With a fully immersive cityscape at your fingertips, jacking cars is just one way to get your rocks off.

> *FULL AUTO* (Sega, spring '06)
Fast and insanely furious, this shoot 'em up combat racing title is like *Twisted Metal* meets that crazy car chase scene in *Bad Boys II*—f'ing nuts. Enjoy hyper-real collisions and an insane attention to detail as you whip through a fully destructible environment in a game that would make Jerry Bruckheimer proud.

> *CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS* (Sega, November '05)
You're soft if you're packin' a pistol, so split wigs with any item—crowbar, pipe, door frame—you find lying around the world of this psychological thriller. Detailed body movements and stunningly realistic surface textures take advantage of the 360's graphic advances and make the hunt a full-on freak out. *Chris Yuscavage*

* Three ain't enough? Be easy. Peep our full video-game roundup, "Running Games," on pages 126-134.



> SUPER NINTENDO?
Sony and Microsoft aren't the only ones on the grind. Not one to be knocked out the next-gen box, Nintendo is looking to get its own revamped system, code-named Revolution, on shelves in 2006. Boasting custom-built processing and graphics chips (code-named "Broadway" and "Hollywood"), Wi-Fi connectivity, and a catalog of classic, exclusive titles to build on (remember *Zelda*? *Mario*?), Revolution might actually turn around a brand that's been on the outside looking in for too long. *C.Y.*

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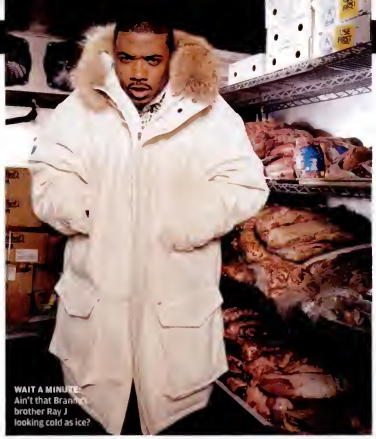
SAMPLE

STRAIGHT JACKETS

RAY J puts this season's hottest outerwear to the test so that when you're hugging the block this winter you won't have to cuddle up with your boys.



WAIT A MINUTE: Ain't that Brandy's brother Ray J looking cold as ice?

R&B dudes are used to heating up rooms. But some chilly receptions are unavoidable. "I love the cold, but in New York it gets a little *too* cold for me," says Ray J, 24. "That's when we need to bring the furs and jackets out." Ain't that the truth? With the Old Man kicking in the door and Ray J's new album, *Raydiation*, bringing the heat, we put the Los Angeles crooner on ice at N.Y.C.'s Spanky's BBQ to find out which jackets are really on fire this winter.

>NIKE
Jacket ($100; *niketown.com*)
Kick your look into high gear with this lightweight down jacket from the name running the game. Guaranteed to be big in the 'hood.

Ray J: "Remember when you were a little kid playing football outside? If you play outside, you got this on. It's not heavy, but the inside material on this is really gonna keep me warm out there."

>PHAT FARM
Snorkel Down Parka ($325; *phatfarm.com*)
Wanna rock white like the neighborhood snowman? With a Teflon-treated wool exterior and a removable fur lining in the hood, this is the perfect coverup, no matter your line of work.

RJ: "When it's snowing and freezing outside, this is gonna keep me warm 24 hours a day. I don't feel like I'm cold in this at all. With this jacket on, I could go right to sleep if I wanted to."

>VICTORINOX
Novgorod Down Jacket ($550; *swissarmy.com*)
A crafty puffer with extendable storm cuffs and an array of features that includes a built-in flashlight and audio wire guides. All you're missing is the go-go gadget toaster.

RJ: "The hood has a real soft, warm, furry material, but the gloves have a real drag-queen effect. I would rock this on Halloween in my leotards!"

>ROCAWEAR
Houndstooth 3/4 Snorkel ($295; *macys.com*)
The fashion house that Hov built delivers a cotton and wool houndstooth jacket with a classy, checkered pattern and 3/4-length look, so now you can handle your b.i. with style.

RJ: "Call me Ray Jigga right now. I'm leaving a big million-dollar meeting on my way to the club in some slacks and a button-down. Throw this on just to keep myself warm. Coat-check it, and I'm good in the club and good out."

Ray J's choice? "I'm Jay-Z's number one fan, but I have to go with the Phat Farm jacket. The materials are better, and if it were real cold outside, this would be the jacket that would keep me the warmest. It's perfect. Second to it is definitely the Rocawear jacket, though."
Chris Yuscavage

> ON THE BLOCK Now that you got the gear, you gotta treat yourself to a getaway. And while the tropics are definitely the place to be when it's brick outside, rocking a snorkel on the beach only works when you're snorkeling. And we don't snorkel. We don't really snowboard either, but when we do, we check in at The Block, in Lake Tahoe, Calif. The 50-room crash pad, billed as "the world's first snowboarder hotel" and conceived by professional snowboarder Marc Frank Montoya and hotelier Liko S. Smith, features a cybercafe, a hot tub on the roof, and current gaming systems in every room, making it the perfect place to pull snow bunnies off the slope. With the second location already christened at nearby Big Bear Lake, and future The Block expansions planned for Colorado, Wisconsin, and even Japan, your next getaway might be closer than you think. Just don't forget your coat. ($169–$349 room/night; *blockartahoe.com*) *C.Y.*

Photographs by **MIKE DELFIN**

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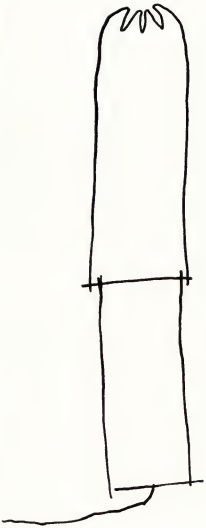
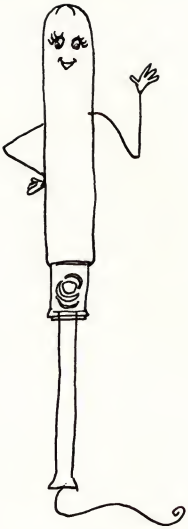


Big scary tampon



Nice friendly tampon

comfortable rounded tip

~

smooth plastic applicator

~

unique absorbent braid

The One. The Only.

~ Get free samples at tampaxpearl.com ~

BARELY LEGAL: At just 18, age ain't nothin' but a number.

Teairra Marí

The Princess of the Roc is officially in the building! Listen up as the Detroit native reveals what makes her feel good.

< Things I don't like about being in the industry:
- Waking up early
- Tabloids
- Overcompetitive people ("Don't worry about the next person.")

> My all-time favorite rap albums:
- *Reasonable Doubt*, by Jay-Z
- *Hardcore*, by Lil' Kim ("I know every word to every song.")
- *Hood Hop*, by J-Kwon

< I'm always sipping on:
- Virgin strawberry daiquiris
- Sprite
- Kool-Aid ("It's good, and it's old school.")

> Best date movies:
- *Baby Boy* ("I love a ghetto love story.")
- *The First Wives Club*
- *Ghost*

< I'm hooked on these cartoons:
- *Rugrats*
- *The Proud Family*
- *SpongeBob SquarePants* ("He's so cute!")

> Sports I can't get enough of:
- Tennis
- Volleyball
- Basketball ("I started watching when the Pistons won.")

< These music accessories are essential:
- iPod
- Sonic impact i-Fusion Portable Speakers for iPod
- Microphone

< My feet stay warm in:
- Giuseppe Zanotti Design
- Steve Madden
- Chloé ("I don't wear flats. I'm a boot girl.")

< To stay fresh and clean, I need these essential body products:
- Crest toothpaste
- Dove soap
- Body butter ("I don't care how my hair looks, as long as I smell good.")

< Other young artists doing their thing:
- Mario
- Rihanna ("That's my baby.")
- Ne-Yo

< All I want for Christmas is:
- A BMW 7 Series
- A condo ("I want to be on my own.")
- Diamond earrings

< In Rock City, I grub at these spots:
- Southern Fires ("They make the best soul food.")
- Fishbones Rhythm Kitchen Café
- Big Boy

< Comedians who crack me up:
- Steve Harvey ("Everything he does makes me laugh.")
- Martin Lawrence
- Mo'Nique

Reporting by Clover Hope

PHOTOS: NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/GETTYIMAGES

Ya Smell Me?

Our resident expert breaks down the science behind anything and everything. Hit her up at *info@vibe.com*, and she just may save *your* ass.

THE PITS: It's lonely being the Funk Doc

I think I might have bad body odor. Whenever I start talking to a chick, even ones who were giving me the eye start acting funnystyle. Help!

Sixth Scents, Norfolk, Va.

Aww, trust me, you're not alone. Well, technically, you are alone. But you're not the only person with BO. In fact, back in the day, doctors used body odor to detect diabetes (fruity smell) and yellow fever (a raw-meat smell). Dermatologist Dr. Ava Shamban suggests having a checkup to make sure you don't have tooth decay, gum disease, metabolic problems, or an unhealthy diet. "Eat lots of veggies," she says. "Too much meat makes your breath smell." Also, wash your feet with benzoyl peroxide soap and keep your body hair groomed. Says Dr. Shamban, "Stinky secretions from your sweat glands will no longer stick to the hair and will be easier to remove from the skin." Which might help you get more skin.

I really want to give back to my community. How can I make sure my donation helps someone directly?

M.I.A.M.I., Cleveland, Ohio

First off, big up your big heart! I used to just donate to wherever Oprah Winfrey and Bill Gates did, because I figured they hire people to find the best charities for them. But then I met Ellen Haddigan, who runs Russell Simmons's Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation. She hipped me to *charitynavigator.org* and *guidestar.org*, both of which give ratings and financial backgrounds on charities. Also, look for ones that give at least 80 cents of each donated dollar directly to the needy.

I think I just got played coppin' a pair of rare kicks on eBay. How can I tell what's real and what's fugazi?

Sneak Attack, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Oh, the horror! If you take pride in keeping it real, there are a few things you should look for before you kick in the dough. "The first sign of a fake is a price that's too good to be true," says Yu-Ming Wu, an editor of *freshnessmag.com*. "Black Air Jordan IVs for $99? Don't trust it." Other signs include bleeding paint and crooked seams, sloppy box labels, and crispy white rubber on "vintage" kicks. Wu also recommends researching pictures of the real thing on Web sites. (Wu's *kicksfinder.com* is a good resource.) What are the best fakes Wu's ever seen? "Well, technically, the Bapesta is just a fake Air Force One," he says, "with quality control."

MAMA SAID: "Don't be satisfied." By Avant

My mom always lets me know she's proud of me. But even to this day, she always asks me, "Are you satisfied?" And when I tell her I still got work to do, she'll say, "Well, do what you got to do, but don't kill yourself in the game. At the same time, never settle either. I'm just happy to see that you've done something with yourself. But don't be happy just 'cause I'm happy." So I always want to keep the same fight and hunger and make sure every record that I put out is still a number one record. I know sometimes when you become satisfied, you don't work as hard. Avoiding that motivates me to keep working, and I'm not mad about that because my mom's done it her whole life.

Illustration by **PAUL OAKLEY**

Droppin' Dime

VIBE's guide to the **10 THINGS** you need to know about this month.

1
GUCCISIMA BLACKBERRY CASE
Because you gotta stay fly-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. ($140; *gucci.com*)

2
NUTCRACKER TROPICAL FRUIT LIQUEUR
Uptown's moonshine, this bottled, rum-based ball-breaker may be fruit flavored but ain't nothing sweet about it. Mix up a Headcracker and start nodding. ($20; *nutcracker liqueur.com*)

2 oz. Nutcracker
1 oz. cognac
1/2 oz. cranberry or orange juice

3
MOTOROLA PEBL
F* all the rocks that you got. If you aren't rockin' a PEBL cell phone this winter, you must be stoned. ($299; *motorola.com*)

4
THE COLOR PURPLE
Quincy Jones brings some color to Broadway with this adaptation of Alice Walker's classic novel. Starring LaChanze. (Opening night December 1, 2005)

5
JUSTIN VINTAGE
($250-$300; *justinbrands.com*)

6
FREE ___SHIRTS, by RAÚL RIVERA for NUMERO UNO DESIGN
Yayo's home, but Buck may be on his way in. Marker included. ($40; available at Arrive, Miami, 305-604-5818)

7
OFFICIAL STREET CARDS
Tell your boo-boo how you feel, nahskeena-meanie? ($3 per card; *officialstreet cards.com*)

8
WE B*GIRLZ
"All that remains is to wait for the right beats—I feel the pull of the circle's energy. I look up and somebody always catches my eyes—they nod, and that's when I know I have passed the point of no return. Whether there has or hasn't been any female representation, whether this song is my favorite or not, whether someone will challenge me or not, I surrender and enter the fire, carrying the legacy of the women who came before me...."—One of many B-girl testimonials in this book dedicated to breakin'. ($25; powerHouse)

9
INMOTION IM4 PORTABLE SPEAKER SYSTEM
A sleek, lightweight sound system that gives any portable MP3 or CD player enough power to rock for the dudes with th-th-the blocks. Yeeeeaaaah. ($100; *alteclansing.com*)

10
RINGTONE MEDIA STUDIO
Skip the top 40 clips, and chop and screw your own ring tones—"It's your boy, Yo Gotti!" Hello? ($20; *ringtonemedia studio.com*)

THE COLOR PURPLE: JOAN MARCUS

WE DON'T HAND YOU A MISSION STATEMENT.
WE HAND YOU A MISSION.

U.S. AIR FORCE
CROSS INTO THE BLUE

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Heaven Scent

V BODY

Sometimes it's more about how you smell than how you look. Find your **PERFECT FRAGRANCE.**

> **WOMEN: 1. Live Jennifer Lopez** is an upbeat fragrance that uses fruity, floral scents for an addictive appeal ($40, 1.7 oz.; *macys.com*). **2. Vera Wang Sheer Veil** sparkles with a combination of champagne rose and dewy violets ($85, 3.4 oz.; *saks.com*). **3. Bulgari Voile de Jasmin** induces relaxation with its subtle, sweet scent ($67, 1.7 oz.; 800-BULGARI). **4. Euphoria Calvin Klein** mixes a burst of pomegranate with a light touch of dewy lotus blossom to create a sleek and sexy smell ($55, 1.7 oz.; *macys.com*).

> **MEN: 5. Le Male by Jean Paul Gaultier** is a classic scent with a hint of lavender and vanilla tones ($69, 4.2 oz.; *sephora.com*). **6. True Star Men by Tommy Hilfiger** is a sensual, sexy fragrance that combines pink grapefruit and sandalwood ($55, 3.4 oz.; *tommy.com*). **7. Dior Homme** blends iris with woody notes to create a powerful, powdery elegance ($45, 1.7 oz.; available at Nordstrom's, 888-282-6060). **8. Polo Black by Ralph Lauren** is a bold scent that seduces with patchouli noir, iced mango, and silver armoise ($65, 4.2 oz.; *polo.com*). *Rajni Lucienne Jacques*

CHARLOTTE DAVIS

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LIVE. LOVE. CREATE. CONNECT. GET REACTION.
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TTE SPRAY 1.7 FL OZ $44.00
TTE SPRAY 3.4 FL OZ $58.00
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RANT 2.6 OZ $16.00
VE GEL 4.2 FL OZ $42.50
DY WASH 6.7 FL OZ $18.00
ES LAST. EXCLUDING GIFT SETS

IM SPRAY 1.7 FL OZ $45.00
IM SPRAY 3.4 FL OZ $58.00
BODY LOTION 6.7 FL OZ $29.00
ERGIZING BATH &
GEL 6.7 FL OZ $26.00
ES LAST. EXCLUDING GIFT SETS

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WITH ANY KENNETH COLE REACTION MEN'S FRAGRANCE PURCHASE OF $58.00 OR MORE.

GET A FREE TOTE BAG FOR HER.

WITH ANY KENNETH COLE REACTION WOMEN'S FRAGRANCE PURCHASE OF $45.00 OR MORE.

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IN STORES JANUARY '06

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VIBe

BOOTY CALL

Whether you avoid high heels like bad '80s hair, stay fresh to death in fur, or leave the house with a little sexy sass to your step, these **FLY BOOTS** will get the job done perfectly.

LOW HEELS: 1. Harley-Davidson Footwear Austin ($132). **2. Timberland** sweater ($100). **3. Franklin Elman** Stephanie ($860). **FUR BOOTS: 4. The Frye Company** Ella ($230). **5. YSL** Ida ($895). **6. EMU Australia** Candy ($130). **QUIRKY BOOTS: 7. Fornarina** Nico ($260). **8. D&G** motorcycle ($645). **9. United Nude** Bubble ($195). See The Details, page 224.

BOOTS: CHARLOTTE DAVIS; WINTER SCENE: MARC MONTICELLI/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/GETTY IMAGES

STRONGHOLD

The Gatling men's boot by Oakley equals fashion and function.

With their waterproof, full-grain leather, high-grip rubber outsoles for traction on all kinds of surfaces, and over-the-ankle shafts for stability, these boots can be worn for extreme sports *and* stylishly rocked with jeans.

Oakley Gatling boot ($150).

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Seagram's
Extra Dry
Gin
THE PERFECT GIN
Seagram's
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IT'S SHOWTIME!

VIBE returns to television to celebrate all that is excellent, inspiring, and influential in the world of urban music and culture from October 2004 to September 2005. The VIBE editorial staff has selected this year's nominees, and our panel of music journalists and industry tastemakers will vote on the winners. VIBE will also salute one incredible, iconic talent with the VLegend Award.

TUNE IN! Find out if your favorite artists will walk away with a VIBE Award on Tuesday, November 15. To enter awards sweepstakes or check out photos from past award shows, go to www.vibe.com.

And now, GIVE IT UP for the nominees of the 2005 VIBE Awards on UPN!

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8:00 PM EST*

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POWER BROKER OF THE YEAR

Jermaine Dupri

John Singleton

Kevin Liles

Shawn Carter

Tyler Perry

BEST GROUP

112

Destiny's Child

The Diplomats

The Black Eyed Peas

Ying Yang Twins

VIDEO GODDESS

Buffie the Body
in "So Seductive,"
by Tony Yayo, feat. 50 Cent

Chessika
in "Play,"
by David Banner

Esther Baxter
in "Number One Spot,"
by Ludacris

Lyric
in "Candy Shop,"
by 50 Cent, feat. Olivia

Summer Walker
in "Badd," by Ying Yang
Twins, feat. Mike Jones

50 Cent

Kanye West

Ludacris

T.I.

The Game

BEST RAPPER

Fantasia

John Legend

Keyshia Cole

Mariah Carey

R&B VOICE OF THE YEAR

Destiny's Child

REELEST VIDEO

"Lose Control," by Missy Elliott, feat. Ciara & Fat Man Scoop

"Pimpin' All Over the World," by Ludacris, feat. Bobby Valentino

"The Corner," by Common

"Trapped in the Closet" (Chaps. 1-5), by R. Kelly

"Welcome to Jamrock," by Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley

NEXT AWARD

Daddy Yankee

Keyshia Cole

Mike Jones

Paul Wall

Young Jeezy

CLUB BANGER

"1 Thing"	by Amerie
"Bring Em Out"	by T.I.
"Can I Have It Like That"	by Pharrell, feat. Gwen Stefani
"So Seductive"	by Tony Yayo, feat. 50 Cent
"Wait (The Whisper Song)"	by Ying Yang Twins

What do I love?

I love beautiful sunsets.
Unless they're too bright because
then I have to squint.
I also love McDonald's® Dollar Menu.

For not much money I can get
a lot of kickin' food which I love.

And no matter how much I stare
at the menu, I never have to squint.

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i'm lovin' it.™

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BEST R&B SONG

"All Because of You," by Marques Houston

"Let Me Love You," by Mario

"Make Her Feel Good," by Teairra Marí

"Ordinary People," by John Legend

"We Belong Together," by Mariah Carey

VIBE VIXEN

Ciara

Jay Bryant

Keyshia Cole

Kimora Lee Simmons

Tyra Banks

BOOMSHOT AWARD

"Can't Satisfy Her"	by I Wayne
"Footprints"	by T.O.K.
"I've Got Your Man"	by Lady Saw
"Tempted to Touch"	by Rupee
"Welcome to Jamrock"	by Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Get Lifted,
by John Legend

Late Registration,
by Kanye West

The Documentary,
by The Game

The Emancipation of Mimi,
by Mariah Carey

The Naked Truth,
by Lil' Kim

50 Cent

Ciara

John Legend

Kanye West

Mariah Carey

ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HOTTEST HOOK

"Hate It or Love It"	by The Game, feat. 50 Cent
"Hollaback Girl"	by Gwen Stefani
"I Ain't Heard of That"	by Slim Thug
"Some Cut"	by Trillville, feat. Cutty
"Soul Survivor "	by Young Jeezy, feat. Akon

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COOLEST COLLABO

"Gold Digger" by Kanye West, feat. Jamie Foxx
"Like You" by Bow Wow, feat. Ciara
"Oh" by Ciara, feat. Ludacris
"Soldier" by Destiny's Child, feat. T.I. & Lil Wayne
"Still Tippin'" by Mike Jones, feat. Slim Thug and Paul Wall

V STYLE

A|X ARMANI EXCHANGE

baby phat

JUST Cavalli

ROCA WEAR

Sean John

STREET ANTHEM

"Dem Boyz" by Boyz N Da Hood
"I'm a Hustla" by Cassidy
"S.A.N.T.A.N.A." by Juelz Santana
"Still Tippin'" by Mike Jones, feat. Slim Thug and Paul Wall
"U Don't Know Me" by T.I.

Nominees include:

112
50 CENT
AMERIE
CASSIDY
CIARA
DADDY YANKEE
DAMIAN MARLEY
DESTINY'S CHILD
GWEN STEFANI
JOHN LEGEND
KANYE WEST
LIL JON
LUDACRIS
MARIAH CAREY
MARIO
MARY J. BLIGE
MIKE JONES
PAUL WALL
R. KELLY
SLIM THUG
T.I.
USHER
YOUNG JEEZY
and many more...

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- "MY PREROGATIVE" BOBBY BROWN

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- "SUPER FREAK" RICK JAMES

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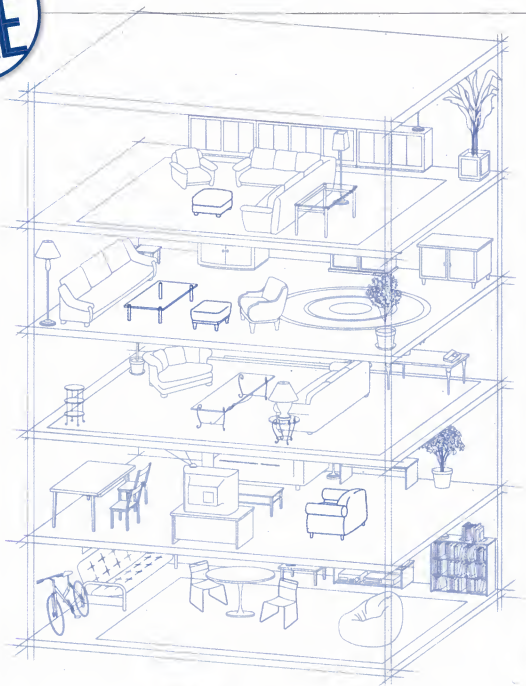


GOTTA STAY FLY

NO MATTER HOW YOU'RE LIVIN', YOU AIN'T LIVIN' UNTIL YOU'RE LAID UP IN THE CRIB WITH A GANG OF GADGETS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS. AFTER ALL, JUST BECAUSE IT'S CALLED THE GRIND DOESN'T MEAN THAT IT HAS TO HURT.

BY NOAH RUBIN

We work. A lot. You probably do, too (we hope), but thankfully, the folks working in little labs—here, in Europe, in Asia, in Area 51—are all building little toys that make our jobs easier. So whether you're an intern or just sleeping with one, rest assured there's a toy for you. So walk with us through our imaginary apartment complex and see what the folks on top and the ones who are on their way there will be playing around with in the New Year. Just don't call it the PJs, 'cause we might have to slap you.

Illustrations by STEVE STANKIEWICZ

PH

THE BOSS

YOU'VE CLIMBED YOUR WAY UP. TIME TO ENJOY THE FRUITS OF YOUR UNDERLINGS' LABOR. SUCKERS.

4

PANASONIC PT-AE900U PROJECTOR
($3,200; *panasonic.com*)
I shine, you shine, but this best-in-class, high-definition home theater projector outshines us all. You might have to move the mirror to make room for the ceiling mount, but you'll still have plenty to feast your eyes on, since you can project Smooth Screen technology–perfected images on screens as large as 14.5 feet. Now that's eye candy.

3

STEWART VISIONARY ELECTRISCREEN
($3,700–$8,900; *stewartfilscreens.com*)
Outta sight, outta mind—but not outta control. These retractable motorized screens unroll with the touch of a button so you get the true theater experience—whether you're screening your next project or just *The Massacre* DVD—without leaving the crib. After all, a tight projector without a Stewart screen is like an old-school Chevy without candy paint—ain't nothing sweet about it.

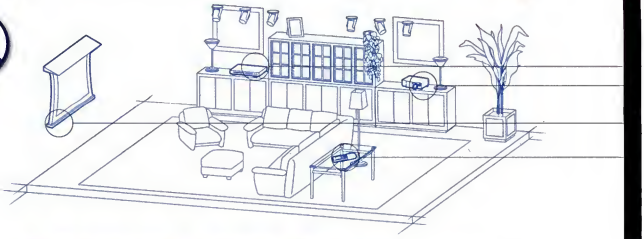
2

OPPO DIGITAL OP DV971H DVD PLAYER
($199; *oppodigital.com*)
Dropping a grip doesn't guarantee you got the best. In fact, when it comes to DVD players, you probably got *got*. So get this: Oppo's got it for cheap, got it? Coming in at under $200, this DVI- and HDMI-ready DVD player beat out other major-brand players costing upward of $13,000 in a recent benchmark test. Get it? Got it? Good.

1

NOKIA 8801
($600; *nokia.com*)
Wanna pack steel without risking a bid? Keep this steel-encased slider phone tucked in your snorkel. With Bluetooth, digital-music-player functionality, FM tuner, SVGA image quality, and superscratch-resistant glass armoring its attractive color screen, this is a classy phone for corporate thugs. Of course, now that Nokia's got your back, you best to watch your front.

TECHNO FILE



RUNNING GAMES

DON'T PLAY YOURSELF. WITH TONS OF NEW TITLES ON THE SHELVES, VIBE HELPS YOU CUT THE FAT.

The ones you should already be holdin':

25 TO LIFE (Eidos)
Stop snitchin' and choose sides in this game that lets you protect and serve or just serve the block. Don't worry, we won't judge you. (Xbox, PS2, PC)

< Samsung LN-R238W 23" LCD HDTV ($1,100; *samsung.com*)

NBA 2K6 (2K Sports)
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MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE (Atari)
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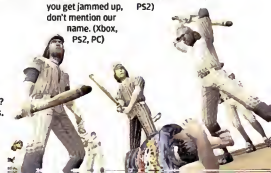
THE WARRIORS (Rockstar Games)
The classic flick goes digital. Any true hip hop head already knows what he gotta come out and do. (Xbox, PS2)



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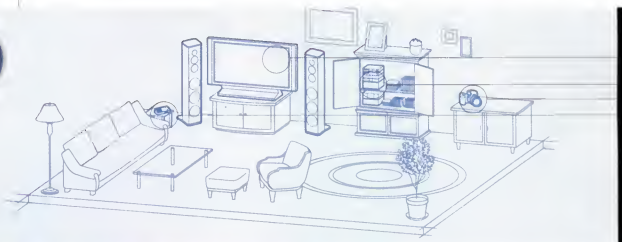

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"I'ma G, I'ma G." That's what you'll be thinking as you try to become a made man. That is, until they bust out the cement shoes. Then you'll be like, "I'ma die, I'ma die." (March '06; Xbox, PS2, PSP)

24: THE GAME (2K Games)
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HALO 3 (Microsoft)
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TAXI DRIVER (Majesco)
When it rains, it pours (movie knockoffs, that is). Grim and violent, this take on the classic flick will finally give you the chance to spit the line, "You talking to me?" right before you off some fool. Sicko. (2006; Xbox, PS2)

Jack Bauer's clocking in *24: The Game.*

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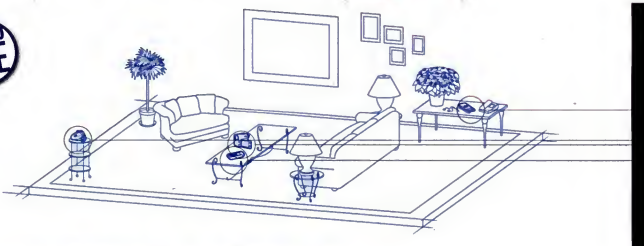

< Sharp 26" AQUOS LCD TV ($1,400; *sharpusa.com*)

Put the magazine down and go cop these now:

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO **(Atari)**
Neo, the One, pops up in his own game, holding more heat than 50 in *Bulletproof*. And he don't even need a vest, just that slow-mo shit. (Xbox, PS2, PC)

BATTLEFIELD 2 **(EA)**
There's a war goin' on outside, and no man is safe. And you're not no man. So stay inside, bomb your boys' tanks, and keep your trigger finger on the controller. (PC)

50 CENT: BULLETPROOF **(Vivendi Universal)**
Hey, kids, do you like violence? Fif's digital debut (well, if you don't count the "Piggy Bank" vid) almost packs more guns than *The Matrix*. Just keep an eye peeled for Teen-age Mutant Ninja Jada. (Xbox, PS2)

Looking down the barrel of a gun. 50 getting rich in *Bulletproof*.

NCAA MARCH MADNESS '06 **(EA Sports)**
All you got in life is your balls and your word. And with recruiting mode added to this year's installment, you can find someone who won't break 'em for anyone...till the grand jury indictment. What up, C-Webb?! (Xbox, PS2)

RESIDENT EVIL 4 **(Capcom)**
Leon's got a sixth sense—he stacks dead people. But these ain't presidents, folks, they're bio-mutated European village people. Yeah, it freaks us out, too. (PS2, GameCube)

PHOTO BY KEVIN CONSTANTINO; DAVID DAMP

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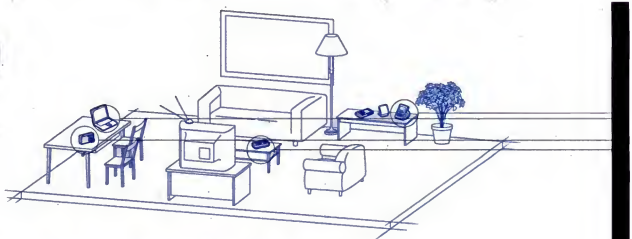


And these:

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG (Ubisoft)
Nothing like tearing through Manhattan, destroying buildings and generally wreaking havoc. This is one game that will make you go ape. (Xbox, PS2, GameCube, PC, Xbox 360, PSP)

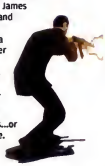
< Sony 26" BRAVIA XBR LCD Flat Panel HDTV ($2,000; sony.com/BRAVIA)

MADDEN NFL 06 (EA Sports)
Run it like a running back when you're on the run. Link it up to your PS2, and you can even have road games. (PSP)

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION ULTRAMIX 3 (Konami)
We don't dance no mo', all we do is this. (Xbox)

QUAKE 4 (Activision)
If you're still trying to run the block, you're thinking small time. Take your hustle inter-galactic in the latest installment of the classic first-person shooter. (PC, Xbox 360)

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE (EA)
White Russians go down smooth. Especially when you're James Bond and you're totin' a Walther PPK. (Xbox, PS2, GameCube)



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You don't need a license to ride out. This shrunken-down, radio-controlled model Chrysler 300C let's you get your shine on, even if it is just on the sidewalk outside your crib. You can even load up the trunk with your own tunes. It may not be the real thing, but it's still flyer than your red Huffy, right?

TECHNO FILE

Mitsubishi 37" LT-3780 LCD Flat Panel HDTV ($5,300; *mitsubishi-tv.com*)

And these:

TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY **(Activision)** What you gon' do when dem blue boyz come through? If you're Marcus Reed, you're gonna quit the gang, join the squad, and take the law into your own hands. (Xbox, PS2, GameCube)

STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II **(LucasArts)** *Star Wars'* games generally suck. This one doesn't. 'Bout damn time. (Xbox, PS2, PC, PSP)

GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES **(Rockstar Games)** *GTA* goes portable. Just don't get carried away—you run up on someone at a light, and you could lose your life. (PSP)

CALL OF DUTY 2: BIG RED ONE **(Activision)** Your grandfather probably kicked some real WWII ass. Somehow, you're the one who ends up manning the Army's 1st Division, though. (Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube, PS2, PC)

THE MOVIES **(Activision)** Pretend you're rich, find the next big star, and release it all to the world in this *Sims*-like Hollywood simulator. It's kinda like being a rapper but without the guns. (Xbox, PS2, GameCube, PC)

Scott Steinberg and Chris Yuscavage

***GTA*: The TSA's worst nightmare.**

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VERIZON BROADBAND STORIES

Last August, Verizon Broadband got together with VIBE to celebrate its latest installment of **Artists on the Verge: The Universal/ Motown Showcase.** At the party, two of the featured performers, David Banner and Chamillionaire, dropped by to chop it up with Verizon about broadband and what they use it for.
Check out what they had to say.

DAVID BANNER

What are some of the things about the Internet that attracted you from the beginning?

One of the most important things to me is the ability to communicate with people all over the world. It does not limit you to how much your record company promotes you. You can get on there and actually promote yourself, and people all over the world who are not necessarily influenced by what America thinks can really getahold of your music and give their own honest opinion about it.

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CHAMILLIONAIRE

What kind of stuff do you do on the Internet?

Man, I got one of the most screwed-up websites in the South. It's called Chamillionaire.com— it talks about the whole Screwed Up Texas movement. Before I signed a deal [with Universal], I had over 3.5 million hits on my website. I'm one of those people who didn't sleep on Internet promotion. That's what's big about the Internet to me, you know, there's so much stuff you can send across the world: your products, your marketing, your shirts, everything. It's people who have never seen me before, but they know a lot about me just from my website.

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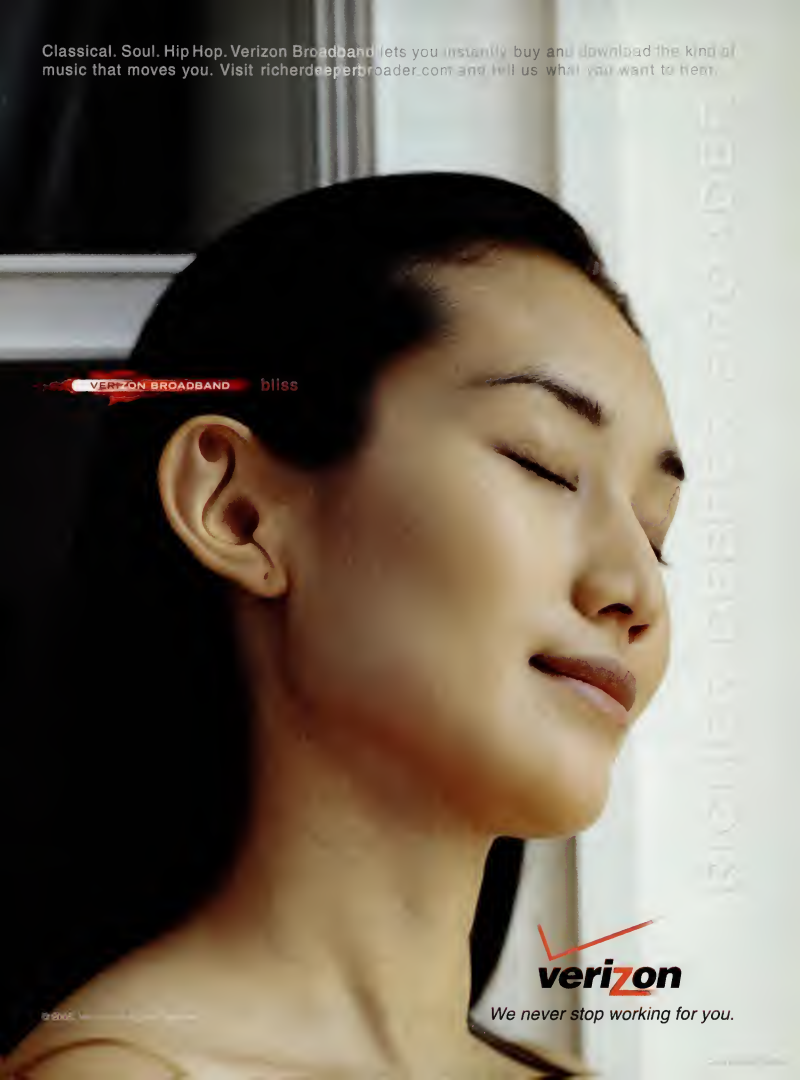
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T-PAIN Sucker for Love

Forget nouveau riche. Sitting comfortably in the lobby of Miami's Fountainebleau Resort, T-Pain—whose sentimental street single, "I'm Sprung," is in heavy rotation on many Southern hip hop stations—enjoys nouveau fame. He looks exhausted, probably from partying at Usher's superexclusive post-MTV Video Music Awards soiree last night, which was the capper to his grand VMA preshow performance alongside Akon. But the 20-year-old rapper turned singer is not complaining, because this is the fabulous life he's always wanted.

Back in middle school, the Tallahassee-born-and-bred Faheem Najm, aka T-Pain, (short for Teddy Pain) never imagined he'd be considered so cool. "I didn't have friends," he says. "I used to get picked on. Maybe I was fat and skinny at the same time." Or maybe it was all in his head, but his insecurity is apparent in the way he avoids eye contact when flashing back to his childhood.

At age 10, inspired by his father, a "Kurtis Blow-type rapper," and his idols, OutKast, T-Pain started building a studio in his bedroom, away from the bullies. He put his precious wooden dinosaur collectibles (one of his quirky hobbies) aside for an 8-track and became obsessed with music.

Eventually, T-Pain joined the local rap group Nappy Headz, which enjoyed moderate success in early 2000 but eventually disbanded. His real break came from "jacking" (as T-Pain will readily admit) Akon's "Locked Up" beat in 2004 and reworking it into the mixtape phenomenon "Fucked Up." Intrigued, Akon reached out to T-Pain and signed him to his Konvict Muzic label. "What initially attracted me to him was that he sounded like me," says Akon. "But then I realized that he writes and produces his own stuff. He would have made it without me—that's how talented he is."

The songs on T-Pain's album, tentatively titled *I'm Sprung*, all share two things: the Auto-Tune—software that creates special vocal effects much like the Vocoder Roger Troutman popularized in the '80s—and the based-on-a-true-story theme. The title track is actually dedicated to his wife, while "In Love With a Stripper" talks about an old infatuation with an exotic dancer.

As an aspiring rapstress runs over to give him a hug, it's obvious T-Pain's days of unpopularity are over. "That was the reason I started doing music," he concedes. "One day, I started rapping in school, and it got me friends." These days, he's got fans as well.

Angie Romero

Photograph by **MICHAEL BLACKWELL**

DA BLOCK IS HOT: Houston, Jamila, Mathis, Tennille, and Tomasina

DAME FOUR **Working Girls**

There's a tiny space in the playfully decorated Madd House Studios in West Hollywood that the ladies of Dame Four dread. They call it the timeout room, where their Svengali Chris Stokes (B2K, Marques Houston, Omarion) will "discipline" them if they don't get a dance move or a vocal key absolutely perfect. "He is a perfectionist," says Tennille Mathis, 18. "He is gonna push you, because he wants your best." The last time they were in here, Jamila Chilombo, 23, and Mathis had to act out Usher and Alicia Keys's "My Boo" until they matched the famous singers' level of emotion to a tee. It took hours.

But for Dame Four, the blood, sweat, and tears are worth the chance to fill Destiny's Child's high-heeled shoes as the preeminent female ensemble. "Coming after DC is tough," says Chilombo. "But we're not trying to follow exactly what they did. It'll be easier for us if we're different."

And they've certainly traveled dissimilar roads to attain their collective goal. Following a failed attempt with another Stokes-helmed group, GYRL, Chilombo brought her singing/rapping act to the table, while Mathis honed her skills as a soloist before finding a home with Dame Four. Tomasina Parrott, 24, is the showgirl of the crew, having danced for Prince, Jennifer Lopez, and B2K. And Mercedes Nelson, 21, made a strong impression on Stokes as the lead in several of the videos he directed. "We all worked with Chris under different circumstances," says Parrott. "So it was really natural for us to be in a group."

Still, talent and familiarity weren't the primary factors in assembling this set. The ability to check egos and dig deep in the elbow grease was essential. Since Stokes gave the go ahead, they've been working nonstop creating their self-titled debut on T.U.G. Records. "The glamorous days are a payoff for the hard work," says Parrott. "Our hair is usually tore up from sweating it out for five hours."

But Stokes has no pity for the ladies. "If they can't handle it, they should get out," he deadpans. "Destiny's Child is the hardest working group out. Dame Four is now showing signs that they'll work as hard as that."

With Dame Four's buzz up and running, thanks to their crunk & B anthem "How We Roll," they're approaching their dream in harmony. "You get a group of women together, and it's not going to be all roses," confides Parrott. "We're staying away from pitting ourselves against one another." Otherwise, it's straight to the timeout room. *Serena Kim*

Photograph by **KEMO EASTERWOOD**

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BOHAGON **Down and Dirty**

Generally speaking, you don't want to call folks from down South "country." It's like calling the kettle black–it damn well may be true, but sometimes it would rather call itself "Cablinasian." Bohagon, for one, doesn't have such identity conflicts. "I don't get offended when people call me country," says the 26-year-old born Cedric Leonard. "Country's like 'nigga'–there's two different contexts. One 'country' means slow. The other 'country' is just realizing it's country, damn near like a shout out."

And Bohagon is definitely country. Reared in tiny Talbotton, Ga. (population: approximately 1,019), he's the type of cat who says things like, "I feel like I sprouted from the dirt," and "Musically, I go through the same thing that my great-grandfather went through sharecropping," without thinking twice. Not that he should. In the increasingly crowded Southern rap universe, Bohagon is poised to stake a claim all his own. "People done heard Southern music, but there's different parts to it," he says from his perch on a stool in an empty sports bar at the Radisson Hotel in Milford, Mass. After 55 dates on the road with Lil Jon and crew as part of the Anger Management 3 and Massacre tours, Bohagon rests whenever he can. And in this moment, he's content with discussing various Dirty styles. "You got crunk music, D-boys' music, and that shit," he continues, "but there's a different struggle that the world needs to hear. They haven't heard country music. They haven't heard the blues."

Well, technically they have (Tim McGraw, anyone?), but before you get to thinking that Bohagon is more Bojangles than 'bow throwing, there are a few things you should keep in mind. Bohagon spent his youth shuttling between Talbotton and some of Atlanta's roughest 'hoods, his first records appeared on the seminal So So Def Bass All-Stars compilations, and now he's officially rolling with the King of Crunk himself through Jon's BMG/Warner Bros. deal. (The ink dried in 2003, and the album, *Georgia Durt*, is coming in early '06.) Says Bohagon, "If you in the country, I'm the gateway to the city. If you in the city, I'm the gateway to the country. I'm where it all intersects."

Or as Lil Jon puts it, "Bohagon is the old soul of the clique. He's not crunk, he's just Southern." You could even call him country.

Benjamin Meadows-Ingram

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DOWN FOR WHATEVER: (From left) Fabo, Shawty Lo, Mook B, and Stuntman stand up for themselves.

"CATS FIGURE, 'AW, THEY AIN'T HIP HOP.' WHY CAN'T THEY JUST CALL US ORIGINAL?"

D4L **Do What You Like**

Despite the sad circumstances that brought everyone to Atlanta's Philips Arena for David Banner's Heal the Hood Hurricane Relief concert, there were a lot of smiling faces around. Especially when ATLiens D4L (Down 4 Life) took the stage. From their contortionistic dance moves to Lefabian "Fabo" Williams's candy-coordinated outfit, the group's colorful antics sent the crowd into a frenzy. And their trademark "doin' it" dance—a two-step modified with Harlem shake-esque shoulder movements and finger snapping—had everyone following suit. But all of the imitation isn't flattering. "We are the originators of the dance," blasts Fabo, 22, frowning at the notion that fellow A-towners Dem Franchize Boyz created it. "We appreciate everything they're doing for us, but evidently, they thought we was gonna be some local jokers."

You can laugh at this rowdy ragtag foursome—Fabo; Dennis "Mook B" Butler, 25; Adrian "Stuntman" Parks, 23; and Carlos "Shawty Lo" Walker, 25—but there's nothing local about them anymore. A collective since 2003, D4L drummed up a buzz earlier this year when their easy, bouncing cut "Betcha Can't Do It Like Me" broke at Atlanta's hot spot, the Poole Palace. Offering a change from the usual crunked-up D-boy sound of the South, their playful, pulsating single "Laffy Taffy" rapidly infiltrated mainstream airwaves beyond Georgia. "You've got to have someone bringing balance," says Fabo. "Every song on the radio can't be about the same thing."

Surely diversity is good. But are D4L's blithe party anthems actually bringing a new dimension to Southern rap? Some industry insiders would say no. The behind-the-scenes chatter is that the group is nothing more than a silly novelty act. Fabo thinks there is another way to look at it. "Cats figure, 'Aw, they ain't hip hop, they messing up rap.' Why can't they just call us original?"

Whatever you want to call it, D4L is sticking with its approach. Why not? It's recently made them the latest underground craze to sign a major label deal with Asylum Records (Mike Jones, Webbie). And their debut, *D4L: Down 4 Life*, is the kind of album that'll have a kid hooked on the catchy chants, and his mama twurking it to the lively beats. And the crew has no problem being the relatively safe alternative from the Southern dope boys. "We've lived that life, so we ain't got to brag on that," Shawty Lo says with a grin. "We want to do something different and put smiles on people's faces." Mission accomplished. *Maurice G. Garland*

Photograph by **SHANNON MCCOLLUM**

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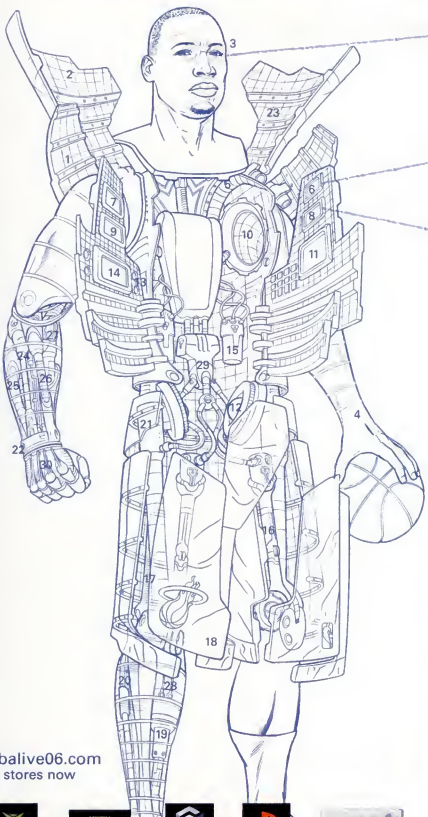

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Da Boot Bronze	3J3S9Y
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Electronic Arts

platforms: PS2, Xbox

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Burnout 3 Save: Dominator Assassin

Madden 06 Save: Madden Challenge Bus

Vivendi Universal Games

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Black and White Graphics	RETRO
Canadian Flag Shorts	OCANADA
Cow Missiles	CHZGUN
Double Hulk's Damage Ability	DESTROY
Double Value of Health Pickups	BRINGIT
French Flag Shorts	DRAPEAU
German Flag Shorts	DEUTSCH
Gorilla Invasion Mode	KINGKNG
Gray Hulk (without suit)	CLASSIC
Gray Hulk Mr. Fix It	SUITFIT
Italian Flag Shorts	Mutanda
Japanese Flag Shorts	FURAGGU
Low Gravity	PILLOWS
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Mad Catz XBox 360 GamePad

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This Holiday's Hottest Releases

50 Cent: Bulletproof

Vivendi Universal Games

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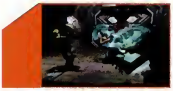

Halo 2

Microsoft

If you own an Xbox and still don't possess a copy of Microsoft's million dollar baby, we'll assume that you fell down a well last year. We might forgive you for not picking this title up sooner if you were more concerned about, say, being rescued, than you were about completely and utterly dominating the online leader boards.

Madden NFL 06

Electronic Arts

You need a reason to pick up "Madden 2006"- the latest version of the #1 selling sports franchise? How about 100,000 reasons? That's how much the winner of this year's Madden Challenge is going to take home after playing in the finals at the Aloha Bowl.

Need for Speed Most Wanted

Electronic Arts

Love the smell of burnt asphalt in the morning? Think "2 Fast 2 Furious" was robbed of the Oscar nod it should have gotten? See a straightaway and jam on the gas with complete disregard for safety? Then "Need for Speed Most Wanted" is your kind of game.

Quake 4

Activision

The much-anticipated follow-up to one of the most successful PC shooters of all time is coming: no matter how many liquid-cooling systems you have for your CPU, no matter how overclocked your processors are, nor how pimped your PC looks- nothing can harness the awesome action of "Quake 4."

SOCOM III

Sony Computer Entertainment

The Leathernecks of Sony's greatest military shooter on the PS2 return and go where they never have before- under water. This year, players can re-create their favorite "Apocalypse Now" moments by rising from the water and unleashing Hell behind the enemy.

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Xbox 360

November marks the beginning of the next-generation console wars. Leading the first battle is Microsoft with the follow-up to the enormously successful Xbox.

Not content to be second in the next console war, Microsoft is making a daring and pioneering effort to be the first next-gen system out on the market- not just being the first, but the only system to launch during this critical holiday season (Sony says their PS3 will probably debut in the earlier half of 2006. Nintendo saying their next system will be out "sometime" in 2006).

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VIBE

R&B LUMINARIES ACCEPT HER. YOUNG SONGBIRDS PRAISE HER. AND RAPPERS BEG FOR COLLABORATIONS. YES, AFTER A 14-YEAR CAREER FILLED WITH LOVE, LIFE, AND DRAMA, **MARY J. BLIGE** STILL WEARS THE CROWN. **AYANA BYRD** SITS WITH VIBE'S VLEGEND AWARD-WINNER AND DISCOVERS THE POWER OF MARY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLIFF WATTS

UN-

BREAK-

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ON THE FENCE: "I don't mind showing my abs," says Mary of her image. "But I ain't giving you nipple."

(Previous spread) White tank by James Perse. (This page) Leather jacket with coyote fur collar by Ralph Lauren Collection; jeans by Citizens of Humanity; rhinestone earrings by R.J. Graziano; diamond pendant by KC Designs at Fragments.

At first glance, she seems as out of place as Dorothy in those first moments in Oz. Among the charcoal and navy suits sprinkled throughout the midtown Manhattan restaurant, her white Baby Phat sweat suit, matching baseball cap, and oversize silver hoops create a startling contrast. More likely the meeting place of CNN and NBC executives who work nearby, Del Frisco's is the kind of dark-wood-paneled hangout where the old boys kept their network going strong in cigar-filled meetings, before the mayor's smoking ban stomped out their Cubans. Yet Mary J. Blige is unfazed, never seeming to notice that she is one of the few females present—definitely the only African-American woman (reporter not counted)—without an apron. Here, she and her husband, Kendu, are regulars. She's on a first-name basis with the staff, and she's happy to stop by the bar to exchange small talk with the manager. // "They let me use this place for meetings, interviews, you know," Blige explains as we're escorted into a part of the restaurant normally set aside for private parties, now empty. She slides into her seat and looks out of the ceiling-high windows that separate her from the tourists meandering past Radio City Music Hall, a block away. Mary doesn't seem particularly enthusiastic about spending the next two hours talking about her life. Newer, hungrier artists might invite a journalist along to see them do anything, from reuniting with long-lost family members to witnessing their bikini wax. Aside from lunch in a closed-off section of a favorite eatery, politeness and professionalism are all that Mary seems willing to offer. Even at the mention of her sister, LaTonya, once a permanent fixture at the singer's side, Blige visibly stiffens, saying only, "I'd prefer to not talk about my family." // Yet this shielded version is a welcome change from the days when reporters had to brace themselves for attitude *and* nonanswers from the once painfully shy Queen of Hip Hop Soul. "God is working me out of that," she remarks when asked about the hats that used to shield her eyes, the whispers that could barely be heard, and the girl from Yonkers who wasn't trying to let anybody in. "There's no time for being shy right now."

And she's right. Personal business aside, in the marketplace of today, Mary doesn't have time to demure. Surely with her upcoming retrospective album, *Reminisce*, old and new fans alike will take note of her musical contributions. But as her seventh studio album, *The Breakthrough*, nears completion, she is going to have to contend with naysayers wondering if a 34-year-old can fight for chart space with girls who were in diapers when *What's the 411?* debuted in 1992. "This is a dark, dirty place we live in," she says. "Turn on the radio, and you hear so many negative things tearing down performers. And record companies drop people so fast." Fourteen years deep, Mary speaks from the experience that comes with surviving label changes, management conflicts, and shady hangers-on. "They tell these young girls, 'If you don't do this, dress like this, you're not going to be able to compete against this person.' And a lot of those girls look really uncomfortable. They look like they're going against their hearts. But you have to tell yourself, 'Forget that other person, what about me?' I don't mind showing my abs and my arms because I worked hard for them. But I ain't giving you titty, nipple, pubic hair, or damn near clitoris."

"A LOT OF THESE YOUNG SINGERS LOOK REALLY UNCOMFORTABLE, LIKE THEY'RE GOING AGAINST THEIR HEARTS."

SHARE HER WORLD

LOOKING BACK AT MARY'S MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS, YEAR BY YEAR.

1971
January 11 Mary Jane Blige is born in the Bronx.

1974
At three, Mary's vocal talents begin to take shape. Her mother, Cora, recalls listening to her daughter singing along to *Sesame Street*, noting the uniqueness of the child's voice and thinking, "Oh my God. My baby can sing!"

1987
While in her junior year, Mary drops out of high school and spends her days doing hair in her mother's apartment. She also works briefly as a cashier at Alexander's, a local department store.

1989
< On a karaoke machine at a White Plains mall, Mary records Anita Baker's "Caught Up in the Rapture." Andre Harrell hears it and signs Mary, first using her as a backup singer.

FASHION DIRECTION BY MEMSOR KAMARAKÉ; STYLING BY TAMEKA FOSTER GLOVER/SWANKY IMAGE GROUP; MAKEUP BY BILLY B. FOR ARTISTSBYTIMOTHYPRIANO.COM; HAIR BY KIMBERLY KIMBLE FOR MARGABETMALDONADO.COM; DEBORAH FEINGOLD/GETTY IMAGES

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Lookin' for love? A soundtrack for those still searching.
"Real Love," *What's the 411?* (Uptown, 1992)
"Mary's Joint," *My Life* (Uptown, 1994)
"I Can Love You," *Share My World* (MCA, 1997)
"Seven Days," *Share My World* (MCA, 1997)

Lost in love? Dive deeper into emotional bliss.
"Sweet Thing," *What's the 411?* (Uptown, 1992)
"Be With You," *My Life* (Uptown, 1994)
"I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By," CD single (Def Jam, 1995)
"Everything," *Share My World* (MCA, 1997)
"Love @ 1st Sight," *Love & Life* (Geffen, 2003)

All out of love? Tunes for the burned and bruised.
"You Don't Have to Worry," *What's the 411? Remix* (Uptown, 1993)
"Not Gon' Cry," *Share My World* (MCA, 1997)
"Don't Waste Your Time," *Mary* (MCA, 1999)
"Your Child," *Mary* (MCA, 1999)
"It's a Wrap," *Love & Life* (Geffen, 2003)

Mourning lost love? Drape yourself in the memories.
"Reminisce," *What's the 411?* (Uptown, 1992)
"I Never Wanna Live Without You," *My Life* (Uptown, 1994)
"I Love You," *My Life* (Uptown, 1994)
"I'm Goin' Down," *My Life* (Uptown, 1994)
"Missing You," *Share My World* (MCA, 1997)

Loving yourself? Focus inward and meditate with these.
"Be Happy," *My Life* (Uptown, 1994)
"Keep Your Head," *Share My World* (MCA, 1997)
"No More Drama," *No More Drama* (MCA, 2001)

Imani A. Dawson

SEARCHING: "When you decide on happiness, it's not an easy thing, when you've been sad for so long."

Sea wasp halter top by Linda Loudermilk; bracelet by Marie-Lise Thompson.

Blige is enough of a veteran to know that such defiance could cost her dearly. In an industry where it's possible to fall off from one single to the next, longevity is granted to very few. Even those who do achieve legend status are rarely considered relevant when compared to the current musical landscape. They, instead, are fondly conjured up by journalists looking to contextualize a sound or by the hot artists when trying to sound humble, as in, "I wouldn't be where I am if it weren't for (said legend)." The grown-folks set may stand up and applaud wild-

1992
< July 28 Mary's debut, *What's the 411?*, lights the streets on fire. Critically acclaimed, the album marries Mary's innate love of classic soul with a hip hop–informed edginess, typified by the smashes "You Remind Me" and "Real Love."

November *What's the 411?* claims the No. 1 spot on *Billboard*'s R&B chart. It's official: she's the Queen of Hip Hop Soul.

1993
May 31 MTV's *Unplugged* airs its Uptown roster show, featuring Mary and Jodeci's K-Ci Hailey (her then boyfriend) performing a version of "I Don't Want to Do Anything." It was so charged with passion that tears are seen behind Mary's trademark sunglasses.

December 7 *What's the 411? Remix* album is released. Combs and new jack swing auteur Teddy Riley are among the remixers.

1994
November 29 *My Life*, Mary's sophomore album, is released. The bluesy collection is widely seen as a public and painful letter to Hailey. With songs like "I'm Goin' Down" and "Be Happy," *My Life*'s intensity exposes Mary's inner torment and becomes a touchstone for her female fans.

1995
July A confrontational interview with model/writer Veronica Webb is published. The testy exchange helps fuel

ly every time Aretha Franklin gets a lifetime achievement award, but the *106 & Park* crowd can't fully understand why she deserves the respect.

Yet Mary is both. She is respected by the mature voices of past generations like Aretha, Patti LaBelle, and Gladys Knight. And young starlets from Keyshia Cole to Fantasia cite her as a major inspiration. "She *feels* what she's singing about," gushes Cole. "Just her voice helps me stay strong." But Mary's influence doesn't stop at the R&B world. Well-respected rappers like Jay-Z still sing her praises, while Cassidy and the Game have asked her to collaborate on remixes for their hit singles ("I'm a Hustla" and "Hate It or Love It," respectively). "I'm proud to have had the chance to work with her," says the Game. "I think Mary is the most soulful R&B artist in the world. Her music will forever be timeless." It is why Blige remains as relevant now as she was in 1992. Aside from debatable missteps—like the "Love @ 1st Sight" video, where Mary seemed to be living out someone else's career, dancing overchoreographed moves suited to a younger, different kind of singer—she has mainly stayed her course, doing the music that feels right to her.

"SHE *FEELS* WHAT SHE'S SINGING ABOUT. HER VOICE HELPS ME STAY STRONG," SAYS KEYSHIA COLE.

QUEEN ME

WHILE MARY'S REIGN CONTINUES, THERE'S A NEW GROUP OF DIVAS IN TRAINING. HERE'S A ROYAL RATING OF A FEW UPCOMING HIP HOP/R&B PRINCESSES.

KEYSHIA COLE: Other songbirds can't touch this one-time MC Hammer protégé when it comes to raw around-the-way-girl appeal. Plus, her debut album, *The Way It Is*, earned her oodles of real love from the 'hood for her sincere approach to music.
Mary-ability: The Oakland seed has Mary's emotional vocals and colorful weave selection down to a science.
Rating:

FANTASIA: This 2004 *American Idol*'s platinum-selling debut, *Free Yourself*, kept her a cut above the competition. With her gospel-tinged vocals and tell-it-like-it-is attitude, Fantasia became a champion for baby mamas and scorned women everywhere.
Mary-ability: She possesses MJB's "ghetto soul" and a penchant for memorable onstage histrionics.
Rating:

OLIVIA: From J Records to G Unit, this Queens-bred songstress rebounded after bizouncing off the scene. Now she's got the most powerful rapper watching her back as she attempts to spread just a lil' bit of love.
Mary-ability: G Unit's First Lady clearly possesses a sweet-but-street allure, but with 50 Cent at war against half the rap world, Olivia is finding it hard to mix love with hate.
Rating:

SHARISSA: Like Mary, this New Yorker started out singing on other artist's tracks (with Beanie Sigel, Wyclef Jean, and Carl Thomas). Her Motown debut, *No Half Steppin'*, didn't have the world buzzing like Mary's *What's the 411?* Still, no one can deny her soulful voice.
Mary-ability: Though she flies somewhat under the radar, with her heavy pipes and affinity for incarcerated Scarface types, Sharissa stays street each time out.
Rating:

TEAIRRA MARÍ: Thanks to Jay-Z, the Princess of the Roc took flight by boldly advising guys how to "make a girl feel good."
Mary-ability: While she had her share of drama, namely "no daddy around" growing up, Teairra doesn't match Mary's depth. However, she's got the endorsement of longtime Mary collaborator Shawn Carter, so you can't totally knock her hustle.
Clover Hope
Rating:

KEY:

- ROYALTY
- DISTINGUISHED
- NOBLE
- NEEDS MORE GROOMING
- ROYAL JESTER

Mary's growing reputation as difficult and contentious. Mary will later cite her increasing substance abuse for the moodiness.

December 22 ***Waiting to Exhale*** **hits the screens, and Mary's "Not Gon' Cry" becomes the movie's anthem. When she sang, "I was your lover and your secretary," anyone within earshot felt her pain.**

1996
February 28 For her infectious, ride-or-die duet with Method Man—"I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By"—she's awarded the Grammy for Best Rap Performance by Duo or Group.

December ***My Life*** **is certified 3X platinum.**

1997
February 26 Although nominated for Best Female R&B Performance for "Not Gon' Cry," Mary doesn't take home the Grammy.

April 22 With Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis included as producers, ***Share My World*** **becomes Mary's first album to debut at No. 1.**

1998
< January 26 ***Share My World*** **earns an American Music Award for Favorite Soul/R&B Album.**

COLE: MICHAEL CAULFIELD/WIREIMAGE; FANTASIA: JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE; OLIVIA: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE; SHARISSA: SHAREIF ZIYADAT/FILMMAGIC; TEAIRRA MARÍ: GARY GERSHOFF/WIREIMAGE; BLIGE: KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/AP PHOTO

BACK THEN

WHILE MARY WAS ASKING *WHAT'S THE 411?* IN 1992, THIS IS WHAT WAS GOING ON AROUND HER.

President: Bill Clinton
VIBE (preview) Cover Artist: Treach
Rap Breakups: N.W.A, EMPD, Eric B. & Rakim
Pivotal Albums: *Born Into the '90s*, *Oooooooohhh...On the TLC Tip*
Grammy's Record of the Year: "Tears in Heaven," Eric Clapton
Music Business: CDs surpass cassette tapes as the preferred medium for recorded music.
World Series: Toronto Blue Jays (Atlanta Braves, 4-2)
News Headlines: Rodney King; L.A. riots; Mike Tyson sentenced to six years for rape; serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer sentenced to life in prison
Average Gas Price: $1.33 per gallon
Super Bowl XXVI: Washington Redskins (Buffalo Bills, 37-24)
Cost of a First-class Stamp: 29 cents
Notable Films: *Reservoir Dogs,* *The Crying Game, Batman Returns*
Academy Award for Best Picture: *Unforgiven*
NBA Championship: Chicago Bulls (Portland Trailblazers, 4-2)
Television Debuts: *The Real World,* ***Barney & Friends***
Cost of Jordans: $125 (Air Jordan VII)

Clover Hope

THIS PAST SUMMER, MARY'S MAGIC PUT her in a limousine with Cicely Tyson. They were off to Oprah Winfrey's Santa Barbara, Calif., home for her Legends Luncheon, which honors African-American women who have made an impact on society. Blige was invited to the prestigious affair as a representative of the younger generation. When she arrived, she was surprised to discover that she had already worked with many of the honorees, from Patti to Chaka Khan and Aretha. "There was nothing in me that asked, What am I doing here? At that moment, God let me know I was supposed to be there," she remembers, reveling in the confidence she'd gained. "But it was something to walk in and see Gladys Knight, Tina Turner, Coretta Scott King, Diana Ross, Ruby Dee—all beautiful and old and sexy and strong. That weekend, Missy and I sat and kicked it with Terry McMillan. I was all hugged up with Halle Berry, thinking, *You don't even know how much I admire your beauty and all that you've done.* Maya Angelou told me, 'I know who you are.' And I knew she meant more than just the singer." Blige describes coming close to giddy in her excitement over the summer afternoon she almost didn't attend, thinking it would be just another industry event. "Do you know how many of those women watched me doing some buck-wild, ignorant nigga stuff in the past and had mercy on me? And said, 'She'll be all right. And when she gets there, let's embrace her.' That day, surrounded by those queens, let me know, Mary, you've done good."

Though Mary no longer questions her place, she is still hesitant to claim icon status. "When I'm called a legend, I say thank you, and I thank the Lord for the favor, and I keep it moving," Blige explains. "I don't let myself absorb it, because I want no man idolizing me. Icon? No, I'm you. I'm working on things that you're probably working on."

She doesn't elaborate, doesn't need to; her struggles have been well documented in the media and in her own music. From drugs, drinking, and her bouts with the wrong men, Mary's problems are almost as familiar to us as our own. We've come to understand them as surely as we know her declarations that

> "I WANT NO MAN IDOLIZING ME. ICON? NO, I'M YOU. I'M WORKING ON THINGS YOU'RE WORKING ON."

she has moved on, gotten it together, found some peace of mind.

The album titles provide the footnotes that track how she's doing along her journey, from the perfectly rendered *My Life* ("that album was straight up death") to the cautious explorations in *Share My World* and *Mary* to the defiant statements of *No More Drama* and her upcoming *The Breakthrough*. Each has been a different step, sometimes back, sometimes just to the side, but mostly forward.

"When you decide on happiness, it's not an easy thing when you've been sad and mad for so long," she says. "It's

July 28 ***The Tour,*** **Mary's first live collection, hits stores. It represents a midway point between the Mary J. Blige of old and a developing, more mature, uplifting sound.**

September 3 Soul Train Lady of Soul Award to Mary for R&B Soul Album of the Year.

1999

February 22 Mary's duet with George Michael on Stevie Wonder's *As* is released overseas. The track is never made available in the U.S., giving it cult status.

May *Share My World* certified 3X platinum.

August 10 Bolstered by material from Lauryn Hill, Stevie Wonder, and Elton John, among others, *Mary,* her fourth studio album, reveals her new confidence and mature style.

2000

< March 4 *Mary* nabs Best Female R&B/Soul Album and the Sammy Davis Jr. Award for Entertainer of the Year at the Soul Train Awards.

September 21 She grabs two Soul Train Lady of Soul Awards: Solo Female Album of the Year for *Mary* and R&B/Soul or Rap Song of the Year for "All That I Can Say."

October *Mary* certified 2X platinum.

BLIGE: PAUL SMITH/FEATURES FLASH/RETNA

almost like taking your fist and breaking the glass. And that's what I've done." She's not just talking about life, but she's also explaining the title of her new studio album, which she recorded over 10 months at Marvin's Room, the Los Angeles studio once owned by Marvin Gaye. It is her documentation of coming over to the other side, away from the depression and darkness that followed her for much of her career. Blige felt "blessed" to make it in the studio built by Gaye, another singer whose drama-filled life fueled much of his most memorable work. "I have glass all over me. In the spirit realm, I'm all bloody, fighting every day, losing sometimes, winning others."

Musically, it is a breakthrough as well. The collection of mid-tempo tracks and ballads produced by Rodney Jerkins, Atlanta's Justice League, and others at first might seem like classic Mary–but listen carefully. Blige has always been most convincing expressing misery, never delivering the same intensity on her feel-good tracks. Yet on *The Breakthrough*'s "I Found My Everything," an emotional, gospel-tinged ballad produced by Raphael Saadiq that recalls early Aretha, Blige has matched the honesty and power found in her heartbreakers. "I thank God for sending you through / I found my everything in you," she wails with a ferocity that sounds as if she's standing legs planted, head thrown back, and arms open to receive the blessings she has just discovered are hers to claim.

"Being married has drastically changed my music," she explains about finding and being with Kendu, whom she

RIDE-OR-DIE CHICK

EVERY MC KNOWS THAT NO ONE MARRIES HIP HOP AND R&B LIKE MARY. TO PROVE IT, WE'VE RANKED HER TOP 10 APPEARANCES ALONGSIDE RAPPERS.

10. GRAND PUBA "Check It Out" (1992)
Grand Puba joined with Mary again on his solo debut, *Reel to Reel*, and they deliver another round of "What's the 411?"-styled lyrical ping-pong.

9. WYCLEF JEAN "911" (2001)
Looking for love in the wrong places, 'Clef enlists Mary to amp up the code red. But the real emergency is how she murders the track.

8. COMMON "Come Close" (2002)
Though this song didn't get the burn of some of her other rap-sung collabos, Common's romantic musings meet Mary's soothing vocal harmonies in a way that makes it impossible to stay away.

7. JA RULE "Rainy Dayz" (2002)
Yeah, Lil' Mo and Ashanti do their thing. But here, Ja went for the gusto by outright crooning–attempting to match Mary's textured riffs with his gruff vocals.

6. CASSIDY "I'm a Hustla (Remix)" (2005)
This time it's Mary who takes a hot line and makes it a hot song (Sorry Cass).

5. THE GAME "Da MVP" (2005)
As the Game lyrically kisses her ring, Mary reminisces over her own career with a melodious rundown of past hits. If there was any question as to who is R&B's MVP, let it rest here.

4. DJ CLUE, FEAT. JADAKISS "Back 2 Life 2001" (2001)
MJB and Clue-minati join forces and give Soul II Soul's dance-floor classic a new-millennium rub.

3. GHOSTFACE KILLAH "All That I Got Is You" (1996)
Pretty Toney's ashy tales blend with Mary's classy vocals for a tear-jerking ride down memory lane.

RAISE THE ROOF: Mary and Method, there for each other.

SINGING IN THE RAIN: Ja and Mary weather the storm.

2. JAY-Z "Can't Knock the Hustle" (1996)
The future King of New York rap gets on his grind with the Queen of Hip Hop Soul–and they get down for their crowns.

1. METHOD MAN "I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By" (1995)
With the help of Diddy's choice melody jack, Meth and Mary invoke the spirit of Marvin and Tammi for the ultimate expression of real love.

Alvin Blanco

October 23 The keynote performer at the United Nations Development Programme's Annual Fourth Race Against Poverty Awards, Mary sings in the UN's General Assembly, with Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the audience. That same year, Mary begins a partnership with M.A.C Cosmetics as part of the AIDS awareness and fund-raising effort, Viva Glam campaign.

2000
January *What's the 411?* certified 3X platinum.

2001
February Mary is the recipient of Rock the Vote's Patrick Lippert Award for her community activism.

< September 14 Her first onscreen performance can be seen on *Prison Song*, cowritten by Q-Tip.

November 18 VH1 airs *Behind the Music* on Mary's life.

December 15 *No More Drama*, Mary's fifth studio album, is released. Its lead-off single, the Dr. Dre–produced "Family Affair," shoots straight to No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Pop chart, making it Mary's biggest hit to date.

December 18 Jay-Z's MTV *Unplugged* disc hits the stores. Backed by the Roots, Mary and Jay resurrect *Reasonable Doubt*'s gritty "Can't Knock the Hustle."

EXTREME MAKEOVER

MARY J. BLIGE'S FORMER STYLIST MISA HYLTON-BRIM HELPS US TRACE BLIGE'S EVOLUTION FROM EDGY URBAN GIRL TO PHENOMENAL WOMAN.

B-GIRL STANCE 1992–1995
Known for: Rap-inspired outfits—baseball caps, giant gold earrings, and jerseys
As seen on: **"Real Love" video**
Final word: "She's a huge hip hop fan and used her personal taste to make her introduction a trendsetting movement," says Hylton-Brim. "Before Mary, most singers were dressed up in evening gowns."

HOOD RICH 1995–1997
Known for: Combining couture with street-chic gear, et al., furs, designer shades, and wearing dramatic makeup
As seen on: ***Share My World* album cover**
Final word: "Mary pioneered the 'ghetto fabulous' movement," acknowledges Hylton-Brim. "She wasn't afraid to put high-end pieces and regular clothing together."

GLAMOROUS LIFE 1997–2001
Known for: Ditching her tomboy attitude and adopting a superfeminine look—fitted clothes and tons of girly accents (particularly jewelry)
As seen on: ***VH1 Divas Live* (2001)**
Final word: "She was stylish and hip for her age while managing to be approachable and real," says Hylton-Brim. "Every young woman related to her and wanted to be like her."

SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE 2001–PRESENT
Known for: Letting her hair down, wearing earth-tone shades, natural makeup, and simple, yet sexy pieces like tank tops and jeans
As seen on: ***Shelter From the Storm: A Concert for the Gulf Coast* telethon (2005)**
Final word: "She's like a fine wine," says Hylton-Brim. "She's mellowed through the years and is more comfortable in her own skin."

Imani A. Dawson

married in 2003. "I'm singing about things I never thought Mary J. Blige would, like really understanding the importance of a mate. *My Life* expressed how I was being treated like a dog. Now it's like, Wow, I didn't know men like this existed. I thought they were extinct."

THREE NIGHTS LATER, BLIGE STANDS, EYES closed, heart open, singing to the survivors of Hurricane Katrina at *S.O.S. (Saving OurSelves): The BET Relief Telethon*. Set to the tune of "My Life," she has recast her most famous song about her own

"BEING MARRIED HAS DRASTICALLY CHANGED MY MUSIC. I'M SINGING ABOUT THINGS I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD."

pain into a documentation of the horrors endured by those she has been watching on CNN. "When you look through their eyes, see what they see," harmonize the background singers, as Mary joins Marvin, Nina Simone, and Stevie Wonder in the space where soul music finds its social conscience. Children orphaned, people living in their own waste, lives destroyed, and government pretending it's not so bad, her words relive the worst of the past week. The lyrics, like so many of hers, are simple, because after all, love doesn't need to be complex.

2002
February 27 Mary steals the show at the Grammy Awards with a searing version of "No More Drama." The galvanizing, roof-raising appearance is widely seen as one of the Grammy's all-time best performances.

August 29 "No More Drama" wins Best R&B Video at the 2002 MTV VMAs.

2003
January 13 Mary wins American Music Award for Best Hip Hop/R&B female artist.

February 23 Mary is awarded Best Female Vocal Performance Grammy for "He Think I Don't Know."

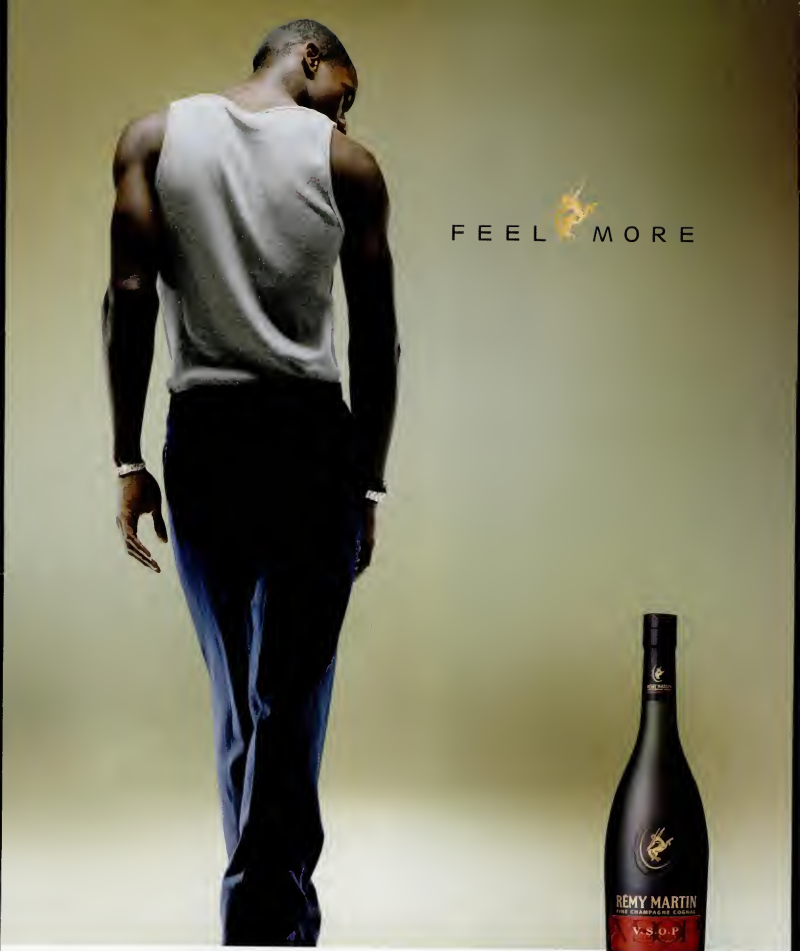
August 3 To commemorate VIBE's 10th anniversary, Mary appears on one of 10 special collector's issues (R. Kelly, Jay-Z, Dr. Dre, and other icons grace the covers).

August 26 *Love & Life*, which famously reunites Mary with Puffy, is released.

December 7 Mary marries boyfriend Kendu Isaacs. The nuptial feast, prepared by Mary's mother and sister, includes oxtails, BBQ chicken, crab, and a wedding cake from a favorite Yonker's bakery. »

2004
February 24 Mary nails her stage debut in the Off Broadway hit *The Exonerated*. The controversial play is

GLAMOROUS LIFE: KEVIN MAZUR/WIRE IMAGE; SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE: AARON HARRIS/AP PHOTO; ISAACS, BLIGE: ARNOLD TURNER/WIRE IMAGE



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WHERE YOU AT?

ONCE AT THE FOREFRONT OF ANDRE HARRELL'S UPTOWN RECORDS, THESE STARS FADED FROM THE LIMELIGHT, BUT NOT FROM OUR MEMORY.

HEAVY D & THE BOYZ

Glory days: The Overweight Lover and his crew were the first act signed to Uptown, dropping gems like 1986's "Mr. Big Stuff." Heavy later took over the reins of the label when Harrell moved on to Motown in '96.

Breakaway: After moving on from his executive post, Heavy headed to Hollywood and notched a string of TV and film credits under his increasingly shrinking belt.

Taking the wait: Since his Bad Boy deal fell through earlier this year, the Heavyster remains a rap free agent.

Heavy D & The Boyz

FATHER M.C.

Glory days: The Casanova rapper scored a top 20 hit in the early '90s with the Mary J. Blige–backed "I'll Do 4 U."

Breakaway: In 1993, he abandoned Uptown's smooth grooves for the rugged sounds found on *My*, an album largely ignored by critics and fans.

Daddy's world: Currently, the New York native is living in Los Angeles working on new music.

JODECI

Glory days: This pair of North Carolina brothers ignited Uptown's chart dominance and transformed the look of contemporary R&B singers with their explosive 1991 album *Forever My Lady*.

Breakaway: After three chart-topping albums, K-Ci and JoJo parted ways with Devante and Dalvin to pursue outside projects. None was as successful as Jodeci.

Making the band: The group plans to release an album next year to mark their 15th anniversary.

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

Glory days: The pretty-boy crooner yielded bankable hits like "I'm Dreamin'" and a role in the classic gangster flick *New Jack City* during Uptown's golden era, the mid-'90s.

Breakaway: After leaving the label, the reclusive R&B singer recorded only sparingly and was seen even less.

Rude awakening: Recently, an internet report stated Williams had died of an unknown illness; it turned out to be an e-mail hoax.

MONIFAH

Glory days: Part of the last leg of Uptown's legacy, this R&B siren gave the label two hits in the late-'90s: the melancholy "I Miss You (Come Back Home)" and the sensual "Touch it."

Breakaway: After Uptown folded into Universal Records, Monifah scored one last hit in 2000 with "I Can Tell." She hasn't released any music since.

Saved: Today, the former sexpot is producing inspirational plays with Nichole Gilbert of '90s trio Brownstone.

Chuck Creekmur

The song ends with a moan, and it is the sound that has been forming in the backs of our throats since the floodwaters first started to rise, and we could do nothing but watch—the sound of our souls shuddering.

It is an apt reintroduction of Blige to the public. In the continued chaos of our lives, it is her voice that seems to capture the frustrations of the wars, the lies, the loneliness, as well as the promise that we can be more than this. Her sound,

"PEOPLE CONNECT TO THE HONESTY AND IMPERFECTION IN MY MUSIC BECAUSE LIFE ISN'T PERFECT."

whether backed by a Puffy-produced beat or a Babyface ballad, has always had a fury, an edge, that is anchored in the belief that things can get better. And with her voice—its raw emotion, notes sometimes missed, and imperfections that improbably create a flawless product—Blige is our modern-day Billie Holiday, a legend determined to sing a better ending to her own life and to ours. It makes you wonder if she knows the power of her music.

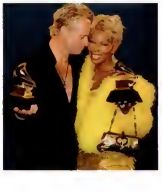
"People connect to the honesty and the imperfection in my music," she says, "because life isn't perfect. But with this gift that God has given me, I want to show what I'm dealing with, let people think, 'She really wants to be free.'"

based on the experiences of real-life death-row inmates.

February 8 Another Grammy goes to Mary for Best Pop Collaboration With Vocals ("Whenever I Say Your Name," featuring Sting). >

October 5 *Live in Los Angeles* is out on DVD. It's Mary's first concert performance commercially available since *The Tour*.

October 8 During *Genius: A Night for Ray Charles*, a tribute to the late singer, Mary teams with Elton John to deliver a Charles classic ("[Night Time Is] The Right Time").



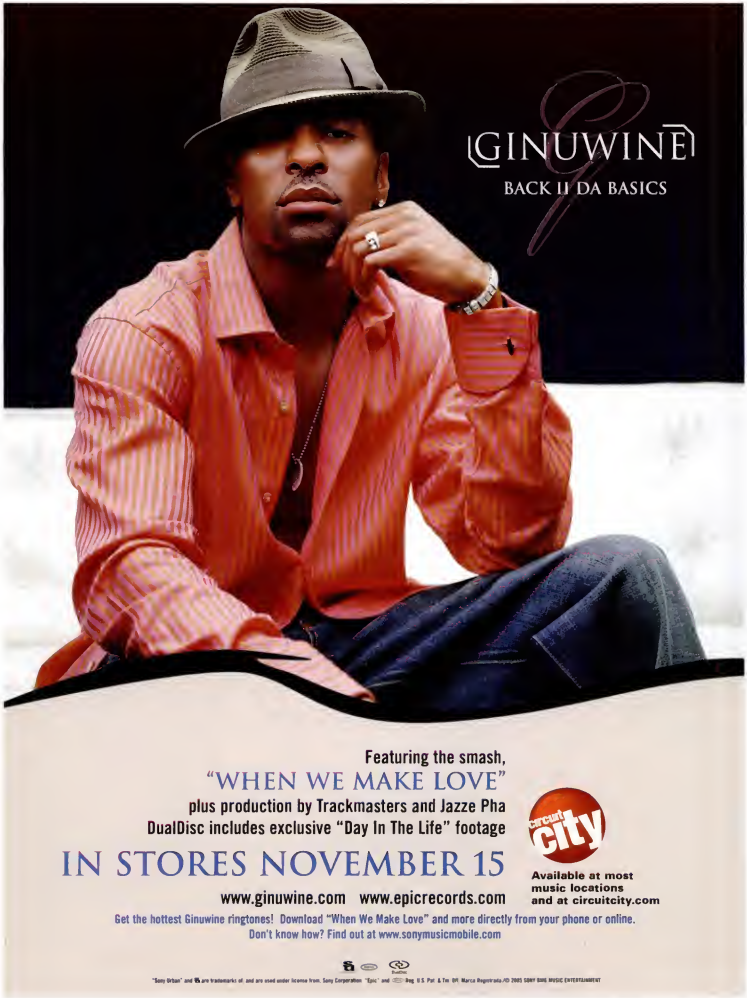
November 22 Performing the Emotions' "Best of My Love," which is later released as a single, Mary joins the Gap's then spokeswoman, actress Sarah Jessica Parker, in a holiday TV campaign.

2005

September In response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Mary, along with many other artists, donates her talents to *Shelter From the Storm: A Concert for the Gulf Coast*, a telethon earmarked for the victims. Linking up with U2, Mary pours her soul into an inspirational rendition of the rockers' anthem "One." And at the *S.O.S. (Saving OurSelves): The BET Relief Telethon*, she floors viewers with her heartrending rendition of "My Life."

Amy Linden

HEAVY D: ANGIE COQUERAN/LONDON FEATURES; STING, BLIGE: JEFFREY MAYER/WIRELIMAGE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THE SCATTERED CITY

WITH NEW ORLEANS REELING IN THE AFTERMATH OF **HURRICANE KATRINA,** THE CITY'S YOUNG, URBAN UNDERCLASS IS LEFT WITH THE MORE MUNDANE TASK OF SEARCHING FOR NEW HOMES ACROSS THE AMERICAN SOUTH, TAKING WITH THEM THEIR DREAMS, CULTURE, AND THAT UNIQUE BIG EASY PERSPECTIVE. **COREY TAKAHASHI** HITS I-10 TO HEAR THEIR STORIES.

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The Crescent City just brought the party to Texas. // It's the evening after Labor Day, and America is tallying unfathomable losses along the Gulf Coast. But on the southside of Houston, Louisiana native Willie "Big Will" Wright, 27, ponders other consequences of the catastrophe. // "Y'all in trouble with these girls coming down here from New Orleans," he tells a group of young women outside a nightclub and pool hall in Houston's Third Ward. "They gon' show you how to wobble that thang, ya-knawmean?" // Big Will was born and bred in the Big Easy. So it's no surprise that he makes the city's legendary dance skills a point of pride. "You got bounce, you got jerking, you got wobbling, you got dodging," Wright says later, referring to just a few of the frenetic styles perfected in his hometown. // Wright is an aspiring rapper. His demeanor and size—6'1", 290 pounds—conjure thoughts of a bayou Notorious B.I.G. And his challenge tonight has clearly struck a chord with the locals. // One woman grows defensive and dismissive. "They can wobble all they want to," she says. // The other Texans let it sink in: Could there be truth to Big Will's assertion that Houston might upgrade its moves in the wake of the Louisiana influx? // "They can dance," nods one of the Houston women. "They can dance."

PATIENTLY WAITING: New Orleanian Donald Johnson (right) was among thousands stranded along the I-10 freeway in broiling heat. Some waited for days for evacuation buses to arrive.

"They can bring it," adds another young lady. "I give them their props."

"Where they at?" asks a third.

"You got a bunch of them at the Astrodome," says Wright, whose rap moniker is Mr. 3-D. He knows about the Houston Astrodome because he's one of the thousands of evacuees seeking shelter in and around it.

But Wright's most immediate concern tonight isn't the survival of the New Orleans wobble. He wants to find detergent and a Laundromat. He says he'll be reuniting with his wife and four kids the next day, and he hopes to greet them in clean clothes. They got separated during the flood, with Wright evacuated to a center in Texas and the others to Arkansas.

Like thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of evacuees, his family will not be returning to "The Boot." Wright is a New Orleans native who had been living in nearby Chalmette, which also was devastated by the flood. He and his brother ran a clothing and candy store in the Uptown section of New Orleans. The store had been open for just a few months before "Katrina took it away." While in Houston, he heard that it was ransacked by looters.

"I won't go back," Wright says. "I'm here in Houston now, and I'm a stay here."

In the aftermath of the hurricane, most of New Orleans was living outside of New Orleans—in the convention centers and sports arenas of host cities, at the no-tell motels of Houston, on a former Air Force base in San Antonio, and virtually anywhere you looked in Baton Rouge and cities close to New Orleans that had not been ravaged by the flood.

Travel toward the city on Interstate 10 and you meet New Orleans hundreds of miles before the Louisiana state border. Its culture has been dispersed in an urban exodus.

The day I drive into the heart of the Crescent City, officials are trying to vacate its last remaining citizens. "It's un-American," complains lifelong resident Peggy Flores as helicopters swirl overhead while her block is surveyed by authorities ranging from the NYPD to the Department of Homeland Security. "Maybe I wanna die here," she says in front of her home, which escaped serious damage, "instead of on the highway."

THE HEART OF TEXAS: Anthony Washington (left) and Willie Wright fled from New Orleans to Houston.

In the French Quarter, Mark Hoyle shouts, "Kill me before I go!" in between Bloody Marys. "We normally drink Hurricanes," he says with a laugh, "but we don't like 'em no mo'."

Because it cares so much about place, carries itself so differently, and contains so many American contradictions, New Orleans is a serious jazz *and* hip hop city. A city that struggles as hard as it celebrates.

"The flood ain't gon' stop no party," says Anthony "Playboy" Washington, 32, a friend of Willie Wright's from New Orleans. "You're gon' keep on doin' what you're doin'. That's how you get it how you live."

Washington and Wright run into each other at an evacuee center in Houston. Their easy attitude in the face of uncertainty is something I hadn't yet seen, on the road or on TV. Like many locals, Wright and Washington know that life-and-death drama isn't a particularly new concept for New Orleans.

In September, at the start of the exodus, I cover more than 1,500 miles, in under a week, through the South. I meet teenagers, adults, mothers, fathers, volunteers, heroes, hustlers, minimum-wage laborers, the jobless, the homeless, the driven, the disoriented, the religious, the hopeful, and the broken. I meet displaced Americans. And nearly every New Orleanian I talk to reaches a point where they are so choked up, so overwhelmed by what happened, they can barely talk or breathe.

There are evacuees whose first order of business is finding family, friends, and jobs. There are others whose biggest priority is finding a bar, a strip club, or the weed spot. There are looters who had also saved lives. This was the complexity that you didn't see on the nightly news.

I search for something less definable than the obvious human and economic costs of the flood. I try to find the city's scattered spirit. Each evacuee is altering their corner of America; their new corner of America is changing them, too. A generation of New Orleanians—many of whom never considered leaving the city, let alone the state—is forced to connect with a time-honored American ethos. Or, as Anthony Washington puts it: "Fuck where I'm from. It's where I'm going." He moved to New Orleans about a decade ago to study at Xavier University of Louisiana and was planning to move to Florida, before getting caught up in Katrina.

"It's like only the strong survive. That's what it is," 17-year-old evacuee Curtis Winley says on a balmy evening in the Texas capital of Austin. "You gotta get it how you live." He sits in a wheelchair in front of the city's Convention Center, tapping an unfiltered Camel cigarette out of its pack.

"In New Orleans, that's how the mentality was," he says. Katrina didn't mint the Darwinian street slogan "get it how you live." It's a New Orleans classic and the title of the Hot Boys' 1997 debut album. But the flood of '05 has added an exclamation point to the adage. This was a time when New Orleans was forced to get it how it lives, amid a natural disaster, in front of an international audience—then it had to get out.

(FIRST SPREAD): BILL HABER/AP PHOTO; (SECOND SPREAD): MICHAEL MACOR/SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/CORBIS; (THIS PAGE): C. TAKAHASHI

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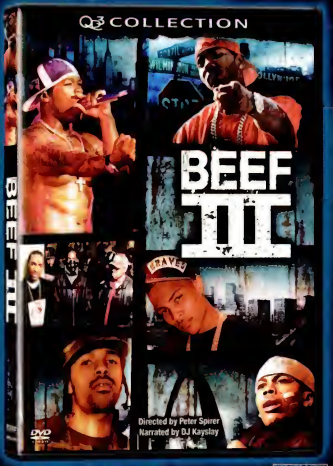

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EXODUS: Five days after the hurricane, a New Orleans family prepares to board a U.S. Coast Guard rescue helicopter. Residents of the Crescent City dispersed widely.

ROB CARVUP PHOTO

Eugene Thomas and Raymond Bell walk down 6th Street, a few blocks from Austin's evacuee center. It's not hard to spot them. Evacuees staying at the official centers are required to wear color-coded bracelets as a means of identification.

But even without the tags, Thomas and Bell stand out. The carefree spirit of 6th Street is defined by live rock clubs, tattoo parlors, and college kids. These evacuees carry weary expressions and move at half the pace of the bustling crowd.

Thomas, 26, and Bell, 32, are from the same New Orleans housing project, and they became friends while helping other residents and each other during the flood. They still don't have many others to turn to.

"I searched the Superdome. I couldn't find none of my people," says Thomas. He was staying at the convention center in New Orleans but walked, waded, and swam across to the stadium to check up on loved ones. He didn't get the news he had hoped for. "My mama, my little girl, my baby mama—that's gone."

Both men see Austin as a place to restart their lives.

"It's not the end of the world," Bell says.

"But it's the end of New Orleans," Thomas replies.

Some New Orleanians are already back to their old routines, but in different cities and towns. Searching for the Cajundome in Lafayette, La., 135 miles to the west, I ask directions from a woman walking down the street in a McDonald's uniform. Felicia French Watson, 32, knows about the evacuee center, but she doesn't know where to start with directions. "I'm from New Orleans," she says.

Watson is wearing a pair of borrowed shoes. She has just finished her shift and is walking back to the home where she's been sheltered with more than 20 other evacuees after hearing about it through a church group.

Watson plans to get her own place soon. She's in Lafayette with her husband and three children, and the kids are about to start school. One challenge, though, is that she's gone from making $9 an hour working the grill at a McDonald's in New Orleans to $5.15 an hour—minimum wage—as a cashier in Lafayette.

She has lost all her possessions and is still trying to account for members of her extended family. "My kids cry every night," she says, staring out blankly from beneath her black visor, "and I cry right along with them."

A 49-year-old Houstonian named Ken Jones is introducing Anthony Washington and Willie Wright to an H-town staple. Timmy Chan's is a popular chain restaurant here. A female cashier smiles through gold fronts and checks the status of our deep-fried orders.

Jones was waiting for a bus when we passed by and asked him for directions. He's a clean-cut man with glasses and a slight stutter. He wouldn't normally get into a car full of strangers, but he spotted Wright's pink evacuee bracelet and decided civic duty called.

"I've been looking for a way to help someone," he says. "In my own way, I hope I have."

Jones tries to play cordial host and relate to and joke with the men. It mainly annoys them. Before the meal, Jones decides to show

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Washington and Wright the roughest parts of the Third Ward to give them a little taste of home. Wright is unimpressed.

"Listen to me, this is the rich parts of our place, in New Orleans," Wright says during Jones's narrated tour of the Houston 'hood.

"Ain't no fuckin' 'hood, yo," Wright says. "This here a neighborhood."

In his mind, Houston's poor areas are nothing compared to what he's seen in New Orleans. Already there is concern in Houston over how these differences will play out in the resettlement. "Did they say y'all crime rate was gon' raise 'cause we were here?" Wright asks Jones, referring to the arrival of thousands of evacuees. "Of course they said it. It's gonna be true," Jones answers.

"In every element, there is an X-factor," Jones continues. "You got the good, the bad, and the ugly." It's unclear in which category Jones puts these men. His skepticism about some of Houston's new guests, as well as his genuine interest in their welfare, captures the ambivalent feeling that has surfaced in host cities after the initial, emotional outpouring.

We drop Jones off on a block of well-kept yards. Washington and Wright notice that he's asked to get out of the car a house or two away from the home he's walking toward. Southern hospitality has its limits.

For older evacuees, leaving New Orleans means leaving the only home they've ever known. But for younger people like Washington and Wright, it's a chance to re-evaluate life, maybe an opportunity for something better.

"It's all about real muthafuckas trying to come up in life," Wright says.

"Trying to change," adds Washington.

"If we don't get a chance to, it ain't gonna happen," says Wright.

BROKEN HOMES

WHILE THE COUNTRY WATCHED THE AFTERMATH OF KATRINA IN DISBELIEF, THESE GULF COAST RAPPERS WERE KNEE DEEP IN WORRY—ABOUT FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND THE FATES OF THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES. THESE ARE THEIR WORDS.

▸MASTER P Home: New Orleans
I left New Orleans one day before Katrina. I couldn't ever imagine this. I mean, this is a devastating moment for us—we saw the bodies floating around. It's sad to see families with signs saying they're homeless. Somebody done seen their mama die in front of their eyes, or their sister or their daddy. We got lives we gotta save, and we're gonna need everybody. This is one time the whole community needs to come together. Me and Cash Money, we've always been competitive. But we had to put our competitive differences behind us and say, "This ain't about us, it ain't about No Limit and Cash Money. It's about us coming together." Me and Juvenile started talking. We want to put together this New Orleans record called "Save Our Hood," and that way, all the proceeds can go back to the families in New Orleans. We all need each other, and our families need each other. So everybody in the hip hop community needs everybody right now. For us in New Orleans, it's a lot of heritage involved. This is our lives. I was able to make it out the ghettos out there, so I was able to see something else. But you always wanna be able to come back home. Who would have ever thought that you could wake up one day and the whole city could be washed away.

▸DAVID BANNER Home: Mississippi
What happened here is no different than if a bomb was dropped over our city. If you have people displaced and without homes or no place to go, it's the same situation. We're spending all this money on what they call homeland security, but there's really no security in America. And Mississippi doesn't have the proper funding to school our own children. So we need help with that. And we need help in all the places that are housing these people. But we really need lawyers to donate their time, because we have to make sure they don't try to take our people's land. Mississippi and Louisiana are two of the few places where the children didn't have to sell their grandparents' land. So, in a roundabout way, this hurricane has cleared people off their land. We're going to have to watch out for the displacement of our people and what happens to the land afterwards.

▸BRIAN "BABY" WILLIAMS Home: New Orleans
I was in Miami when Katrina hit, but I told my family to go to Houston the day before. My sisters stayed and ended up at the Superdome. I haven't spoken with three of them yet. I know how we New Orleans natives are, we're like, "Fuck that. We ain't going nowhere." A nigga ain't got nothing, but he still don't wanna leave that. All my houses took a licking. And we're trying to get the families somewhere to live. But we're gonna be facing so many obstacles. Then we're gonna have to find out who died. It's just a fucking crisis. I can't stand to watch the coverage, 'cause you're really going through a tormented situation. You've known these people and this community all your life. I took a couple of million of my own money to buy supplies. I know my people and how we're hurting. I love my city. I never wanted to leave—but now you really question yourself.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH: "Beware of a land grab," warns Banner, here performing at a relief concert at B.B. King's in N.Y.C.

▸SLIM THUG Home: Houston
I ain't think it was serious until the day the levee broke. I was in New York when it happened, but when I came home from a show, I just stayed up all night watching it on TV. A lot of people live in fantasy land when it comes to America, like we can't be touched in no form or fashion. And when they brought the people to Houston, I thought, Damn. You got these people out here who don't have shit. They were already poor, and now they lost their fuckin' houses and the little shit they had, even their jobs. And they just dropped them off here in this city. So, I think it's gonna be crazy around Houston. A lot of people really just got to start from scratch. I'd just like to see these people out of harm. I got nothing but sympathy for them.

▸B.G. Home: New Orleans
Before the hurricane, I was planning to stay in the house I had just built. I said, Man, I'll ride the storm out. I evacuated after my auntie called me crying. "Please don't stay," she said. "The house is gon' be alright." So I flew my family to Detroit—my second home. Now, I'm a real nigga, but I cried when I saw this man saying how his wife died in his hands. I know about 15 people that drowned, including one of my partners. I decided to raise money because I'm at the center of my circle, and if I don't show no effort or determination, everybody's gon' break down. This is just one of God's challenges.

As told to Amy Linden, Chris Yuscavage, and Clover Hope

BANNER: JOHNNY NUÑEZ/WIRELIMAGE

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KARINA TAIRA

THE BEAT MUST GO ON

THE HEART OF AMERICAN POP MUSIC LIES IN THE RICH MUSICAL HISTORY OF NEW ORLEANS.

THE GODFATHER: Armstrong (seen here in Paris in 1962) led a cultural revolution.

Along with buildings, landscapes, and lives, an enormous and, quite possibly, irreplaceable chunk of American soul was also uprooted when Katrina's fury bore down on New Orleans. In the projects, clubs, and streets of the Crescent City lie the backbone and backbeat of nearly every genre of American popular music. And like other cities under the groove, from Dakar to Detroit, New Orleans pulses to a rhythm all its own, whether you call it jazz, zydeco, funk, R&B, rock 'n' roll, or hip hop.

Historians note that the beat began possibly as far back as the 1700s, when slaves brought over by the French gathered in Congo Square to play drums. For years, it was the only public place where blacks were allowed to congregate and perpetuate African traditions of drumming and dance. That spirit of freedom would continue to fuel the city's creative community as New Orleans's jambalaya of races and cultures midwifed a form of expression dubbed jazz. As practiced by local legends like Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, and Louis Armstrong, jazz, by the 1920s, had become America's de facto soundtrack for good times and fast living.

The New Orleans scene didn't rest on its laurels. In the late '40s and throughout the '50s, producer Dave Bartholomew fashioned and oversaw a studio band that backed up some of R&B and rock 'n' roll's earliest and most enduring hit makers, among them Ernie K-Doe ("Mother-In-Law"), Little Richard ("Tutti-Frutti"), and recent evacuee Fats Domino ("Blueberry Hill"). The rollicking grooves then shape-shifted as the gris-gris funk of the Meters, the Neville brothers, and Allen Toussaint, best known for penning "Lady Marmalade," rose to prominence in the '60s and '70s. By the '90s, New Orleans was HQ for the rugged, swamp-flavored hip hop of the No Limit and Cash Money cliques. It's no wonder native son and jazz great Wynton Marsalis recently observed, "New Orleans is the most unique of American cities because it is the only city in the world that created its own full culture." One that must return.

Amy Linden

Washington says the hurricane hit at a moment when he was trying to get his life back in order after completing an eight-month bid for drug possession last spring. "Maybe that water will wash away some of those bad spirits that lurk around that city, man. Like Mark Twain says, 'It's the only city where he walks amongst the dead.'"

Washington and his pet dog escaped New Orleans's hard-hit Ninth Ward. He walked to the Superdome, where he stayed about four days before being loaded onto a bus, destination then unknown.

"You can call me a refugee, you can call me an evacuee, you can call me what you want—I'm alive," Washington says when I ask what he thinks is the term that best describes his predicament. He spent nearly a week at the official evacuee center in Houston, where Wright is staying, but says he prefers the hotel he's moved to—four or five friends to a room. It's in a transient section of southwest Houston made up of immigrant enclaves, nightclubs, bars, strip clubs, and low-budget hotels.

INSIDE OUT: (Left) Kids snooze on the sidewalk outside the New Orleans convention center. (Right) Hurricane Katrina evacuees must wear bracelets to enter or leave the shelters.

"We're a bunch of Americans from New Orleans who just really want to get back to being stable," Washington says. "Get our lives back and everything, and I can't wait till it starts happening."

Washington and Wright know they'll have to start earning money soon. The evacuee shelters are temporary. The donations and generosity will dry up, and so will their savings. Still, the complete upheaval of their lives seems to have helped nurture 10-gallon, Texas-size dreams.

Washington is working on a business plan to launch a *Playboy*-like skin mag. "Something classy," he says. "Something that I can show my mom."

Wright is already making connections in the Houston music scene. Earlier in the night, he runs into a man named Big Ray, who says he sings hooks and plays music for local rappers. Wright drops him a few rhymes:

Make a left on a hater / You know that ain't right /
Man, it's Uptown every day / All the time /
And fo' life.

"I don't deny the gutterness in my blood," he tells Big Ray. "I know you love it."

"How y'all say it in New Orleans, 'Allll rrreally, baby?'" Ray says hospitably.

Wright tells Ray that New Orleans is going to do it big in Texas just like it did back home.

"You gon' see us," Wright says.

"Allll rrreally?"

"We gon' be in your face."

"Allll rrreally?"

"Really."

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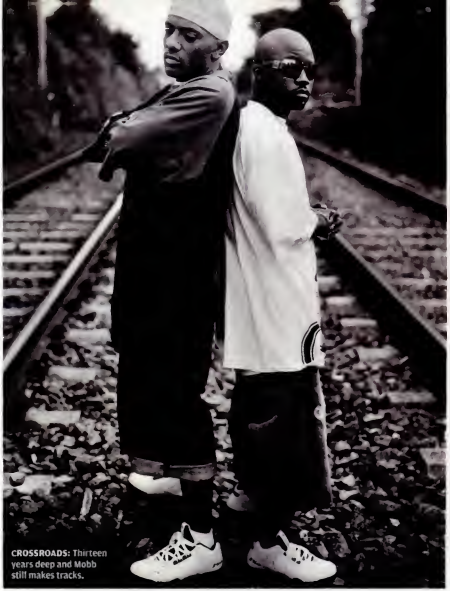
Signing Bonus

These days, they applaud Southern rap, talk terrorist attacks, and dodge romance rumors involving Lindsay Lohan. Yep, **MOBB DEEP** really has enlisted in 50 Cent's G Unit army. **TOSHITAKA KONDO** asks how.
Photographs by Neil Gavin



CROSSROADS: Thirteen years deep and Mobb still makes tracks.

HAVOC IS LAUGHING. Lounging at G Unit's Manhattan headquarters, dipped head to toe in G Unit gear, he seems pleased. Aside from the jokes he tosses around, it's apparent that Havoc can hardly believe Mobb Deep's good fortune. And when Prodigy, his rhyme partner for more than 13 years, joins the conversation via telephone (a late-night studio session kept him in Long Island), he, too, sounds happy. // With their jovial demeanor, you'd never suspect that Prodigy (né Albert Johnson), 31, and Havoc, aka Kejuan Muchita, 30—G Unit's latest enlistees—have just spent the last four years in turmoil. There was the infamous Summer Jam attack from Jay-Z to overcome; rumors of their breakup to beat back; and a disappointing last showing to ponder (*Amerikaz Nightmare* peaked at around 300,000 units sold). // Now that they've signed with G Unit, Hav and P maintain all that's behind them. And never mind that line where 50 raps: "I'll do your little ass like Jay did Mobb Deep." That's all water under the bridge, too. According to Prodigy and Havoc, the 50 Cent connection ensures their upcoming release, *Blood Money*, will have them laughing all the way to the piggy bank.

VIBE: Your signing to G Unit seemed to catch everyone off guard. How did that happen?

Prodigy: 50 Cent heard that we were free agents. He called Hav like, "Yo, what's up? I'm fucking with y'all. Let's do it."

After seven albums being self-contained, by joining G Unit are you admitting that maybe your way wasn't working anymore?

Havoc: Nah, not at all. The way we were doing it always worked. It was just the record companies were fucking up. Now we have a better platform.

50 recently said he's picking all the beats for your upcoming album. Is that true?

H: He sends beats to us. If we don't like it, we always got our opinions. But he's got such a good ear that every track he picks is right, so it's all good. I'm still producing somewhere close to half the album.

Did you sign an artist deal?

H: Nah, not like a regular artist deal. We got a lot of perks. We got more points than any artist ever got to this day, so it's a real good deal.

Perks? Give me a few examples of these perks.

P: We got Porsches.

H: Top of the line. I got a GT3 that's nonrecoupable.

So, I guess it didn't bother you that on "Piggy Bank" 50 said to Jadakiss, "I'll do your little ass like Jay did Mobb Deep?"

H: Nope.

P: When he said that line, he was just talking about what really happened. At Summer Jam, Jay-Z put up a picture of me when I was a little kid in my grandmother's dance school. We're all bigger than Jay, now.

Similar to Ja Rule's *R.U.L.E.*, *Amerikaz Nightmare* had its fans, but it didn't achieve commercial success. Were you worried that your time might have passed?

H: The difference with Ja Rule is people were tired of him. We came out with a good record, but the record company wasn't getting it to the fans.

Speaking of Ja Rule, 50 is known for his beefs. Will it be a problem for you to work with people he's beefing with?

H: I'm a producer, bottom line. Nobody can tell me what I can and can't do as far as me being creative. And 50 is not even like that at all. But I will say that I'm down for my team, and I ain't trying to start no friction.

Havoc produced "Don't Need Your Love" on *The Documentary*. And P, you did "Dead Bodies" on the Alchemist's album with the Game. Will you continue to work with him in the future?

P: If Fif tells me, "Yo, don't give that nigga no verses," them niggas ain't getting no verses, man. It's not gonna stop my money, 'cause I'll get money from somewhere else. I'll be, like, All right, cool. What verse can I do? That's where I'm gonna get money from then.

It doesn't bother you that someone has a say in your music relationships?

P: Hell no. He made me rich.

How does your G Unit affiliation affect your relationship with Nas?

P: Who that? You talking about Milkshake? He's not in the picture no more. He

MARY J BLIGE

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THE RETROSPECTIVE ~ IN STORES

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left the radar.

Is Big Noyd going to be involved with your new album, *Blood Money*?

P: Once Mobb Deep gets an album out and goes out on tour, and our album is selling, then we'll start thinking about different artists. But right now, we're not really worried about nobody else but Mobb Deep.

There was a controversy earlier this year with your former manager, Littles, saying you two were breaking up. What was that about?

P: Who that, son? I don't even know who that is.

Okay, convenient amnesia. Maybe you can remember Lindsay Lohan. And how she's been chilling with y'all, hard.

P: [*Laughs*]

I heard she was feeling you, P.

H: Oh shit! The word is out. [*Laughs*]

P: Yeah, she's cool. I'd definitely holla at her.

So what's really going on with Ms. Lohan?

P: She's definitely got it going on. I'd definitely holla at her. Lindsay, holla at the kid, man!

Let's get back to your music. Hav's improvement, lyricwise, has made an impact, so much so, that his skills have sparked comparisons between you two. Is there a friendly battle that goes on when you write?

H: When you rhyming alongside somebody like Prodigy, you have no other choice but to step up your lyrics. But, when you hear this new album, there will be no mistake where P stands. This motherfucker is a monster, son! He's got me sweating right now. I tried to catch up with the verses. I was like, Goddamn!

P: Me and Hav always feed off each other. Like, I'll go to the studio and Hav will have 10 songs done, and then I got to catch up to him.

H: Right. Now, I'm trying to catch up. This shit is crazy.

P: We go back and forth. We build and get stronger off of each other.

So, while you're running with 50, your old DJ the Alchemist was Eminem's tour DJ.

H: Yeah, he's part of Em's family officially now. And he's still part of our family, too. We all just one big family. Eminem welcomed us to the family, and that was it.

With your recent appearance on the Anger Management 3 tour, you seem to have lost weight. Are you still struggling with sickle cell?

P: I'm in perfect health. I ain't been sick in a long time.

H: We slim dudes. But check this bank account. Tell me how I look now [*laughs*]. My hips look kind of fat, right? My pockets are bulging.

While you were on tour, there was a bombing in London. People have been speculating about New York's safety again. Now that you're back, does that bother you at all?

P: I don't think the terrorists are mad at the 'hood. We gonna be all right.

H: I ain't gonna be riding around scared to death thinking that something's gonna blow up. That's not living. What if something never blows up? Then, by the time I'm 60, I'll have been paranoid for nothing. So I'll just watch out for suspicious bags. But I haven't ridden the train in a long time. Once in a blue moon, I'll ride the F train to Manhattan and reminisce.

Now that we're on the subject of New York, do you think Larry Brown can save your beloved Knicks?

H: Hmm. I don't know. I think he'll take them farther than they got last year.

But that's not saying much. They were horrible last year.

H: Yeah, that's why I said that [*laughs*]. That's the most I can say. I can say that at least they're gonna be the last seed in the playoffs. Stephon Marbury will step up to the plate and do what he's been doing. So this season might be promising.

RANK AND FILE: Prodigy and Havoc (kneeling with Spyda Loc, right) fall in line with 50's G Unit army.

How do you feel about New York's rap chances right now?

H: I mean, everybody gets their time. It started in New York, and it's gonna come back, ultimately. People go, "What about the South?" That's a tool to pit everybody against one another. We're all making black music. Right now, our Down South brothers are winning 'cause they deserve it.

Who do you guys feel is really representing New York right now?

H: Mobb Deep.

Anyone else?

H: Mobb Deep.

Duly noted. Since signing to G Unit, what's been the biggest change in your lives?

P: We're megastars now.

H: I never thought it'd be this way.

P: When we signed that contract, Fif gave us the keys to the planet. We can open up any door right now.

Borough Love

Before 50 Cent and Mobb Deep's alliance, these 10 all-Queens collaborations were the big talk of New York.

1. "One Love," NAS
Q-Tip's jazzy production offers a perfect canvas for Nas's ever-quotable verses about life in the 'Bridge.

2. "L.A., L.A.," CAPONE-N-NOREAGA, FEATURING PRODIGY AND TRAGEDY KHADAFI
After Snoop Dogg came through and crushed the buildings on "New York, New York," C-N-N and company rebuild and retaliate with a cunning comeback. (But no buildings were crushed.)

3. "Fast Life," KOOL G RAP, FEATURING NAS
Lyricism 101: The teacher (G Rap) schools his top apprentice on the beautiful art of wordplay (minus the lisp).

4. "Drink Away the Pain (Situations)," MOBB DEEP, FEATURING Q-TIP
The Mobb's slizzard metaphors and Tip's designer obsessions whet the palate.

5. "Body In the Trunk," N.O.R.E., FEATURING NAS
Goodfellas Jose Luis and Nas Escobar team up for a Scorsese-esque saga on wax.

6. "Who U Rep With," 50 CENT, FEATURING NAS AND BRAVEHEARTS
Before 50 opened his piggy bank, things were all good with God's Son and crew.

7. "Live at the Barbecue," MAIN SOURCE, FEATURING NAS, FATAL, AND AKINYELE
Though young Nasir cooks up a buzzworthy 26 bars, Akinyele's unorthodox punch lines are just as rousing.

> 8. "Da Bridge 2001," NAS, FEATURING CAPONE, CORMEGA, MARLEY MARL, MC SHAN, MILLENNIUM THUG, MOBB DEEP, NATURE, TRAGEDY KHADAFI
More than 15 years after the endemic classic, QB's finest united to pay homage to hip hop in their 'hood.

9. "Ghetto Starz," ONYX, FEATURING THE LOST BOYZ
Two of Queens's most popular groups this side of Run-DMC form like Voltron, before tragedy and conflict force them to disband.

10. "Queens Day," RUN-DMC, FEATURING NAS AND PRODIGY
Run-DMC bridges the gap with Nas and P, for one final hooray.

Jozen Cummings

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THERE'S A CURE

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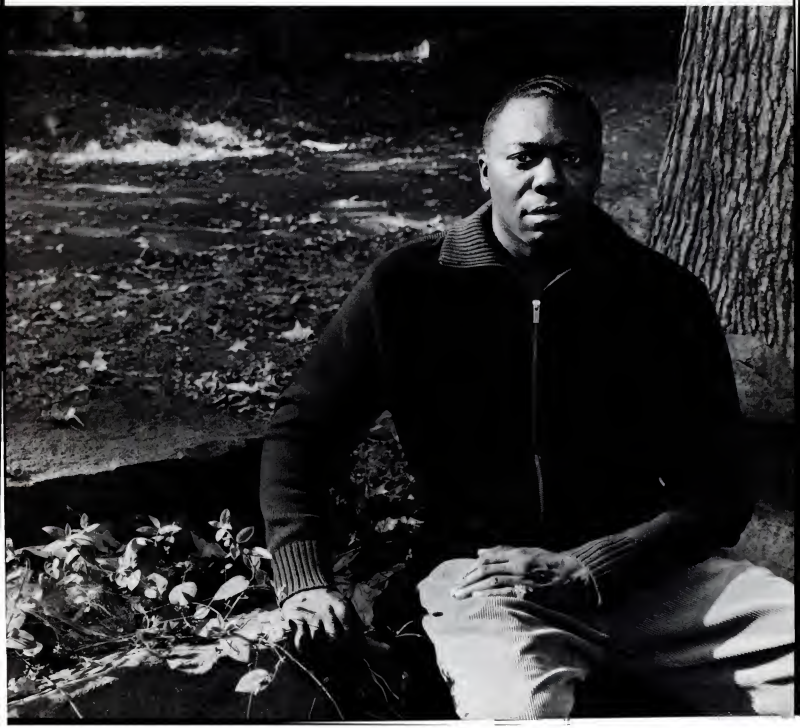
The Score

In the beef-obsessed world of gangsta rap, managers like James "Henchmen" Rosemond are the real bad boys who move in silence. He's seen it all, from the battles between 50 Cent and the Game to the night Tupac got shot at Quad Recording Studios. And now Henchmen wants you to know what really went down so he can move on with his life. Ethan Brown reports on Henchmen's redemption. Photographs by Dana Lixenberg



99 PROBLEMS: "I move like I'm being investigated," says Henchmen. "I never shook that."

This is how problems begin," James "Henchmen" Rosemond says in his buzz saw voice. He's standing on the wrong side of a security barrier that's blocking the entrance to the backstage of Miami's Bayfront Park Amphitheater only minutes before the Game, the star client of Henchmen's management company, Czar Entertainment, is scheduled to rock a crowd of nearly 12,000 fans. Moments earlier, the Game drove himself right up to the Bayfront's backstage in his silver Bentley, causing a near riot. Now the cops won't let Henchmen through. // When Henchmen tells you to avoid a problem, it's a good idea to listen. Though he isn't physically intimidating—he's 5'8", and at 40, at least 10 years past a street-fighter's prime—there is something icily menacing about him. Sure enough, the cops listen to him and move the security barrier, allowing the Game to hit the stage with just seconds to spare. // The Game's set is short—hip hop and R&B stars like Diddy, Amerie, and Lil Jon share the bill tonight—but it's beset by drama. Someone provided his DJ with the wrong mix of "Hate It or Love It," so the Game has to perform the song a cappella with the audience enthusiastically chanting along. When the promoter turns off Game's mic after his 10-minute set, there are loud, angry catcalls, so Henchmen gets the juice turned back on for one more song, then hustles the Game offstage like a boxing trainer with a heavyweight contender. Evidently, the real shot-caller is not the headliner himself but the man in the background, the one who pulls the strings and counts the chips. // Henchmen is one of the most respected and feared players in hip hop. Having a guy with a storied street rep like him

around is a necessity in a beef-dominated industry that's starting to resemble pro wrestling. More important, Henchmen is there to deal with threats the fans never see: jealous friends and family and even rival gang members from clients' old neighborhoods. "He needed me for the street side," Henchmen says of the Game, who is associated with L.A.'s feared Cedar Block Piru Bloods. "Even though West Coast politics is a lot different, those guys respect me as an OG. They know my street politics from New York. Nobody else could do the gang politics like me. When they get ignorant with me, I get ignorant with them right back. I tell them, We can do the violence thing—if that's what you want to do, I can do that. I've done that my whole life. They do their research. They know I'm not a talker. I don't do that much talking."

If Henchmen's sentiments sound suspiciously like a rapper boasting about his street cred, that's precisely the point. As well as protection, ex-convicts like Henchmen offer some clients a glimpse into a street life far more violent and dramatic than anything in their own lives. Henchmen and a small cadre of other ex-hustlers (see sidebar, page 187) are moving the music into its current street-credibility-obsessed moment, exemplified by a Reebok TV ad that features 50 Cent boasting about being shot and former drug dealers finding their place in the ranks of music industry executives.

But now Henchmen faces a crucial question that haunts every street soldier who has followed him into the rap game: Can he pull off the perilous balance of exploiting his reputation without falling back into his old ways? Henchmen and the Game were charged with second-degree assault by radio host Richard "DJ Zxulu" Dunkerson, who claims that Henchmen punched him in the face and upper body at WKYS's Lanham, Md., studios on January 21, 2005, after he had allegedly joked that Henchmen's cell phone headset looked like something out of *Star Trek*. Dunkerson was treated at a local hospital and released. Henchmen refuses to discuss the incident, saying only, "I'm so upset about the radio station thing because it's like, How could I fall into that petty bullshit?"

More ominously, one of Henchmen's former Brooklyn street buddies, Walter "King Tut" Johnson—who, along with Jacques "Hait-

GOLDEN EARS

ONCE YOU GET PAST HENCHMEN'S SCARY REP, YOU'LL FIND A BONA FIDE MUSIC MAN WITH A TRACK RECORD THAT TRANSCENDS THE GAME'S CURRENT SUCCESS.

10-Minute High: While working with Sony UK, Henchmen met Bryce Wilson. After the two collaborated on a few songs, they came up with a vision for a male-female duo called Groove Theory. As soon as they found a counterpart for Wilson, the comely Amel Larrieux, they recorded a demo and got a deal with Epic.

Common Roots: Henchmen was planning a tour for Groove Theory when the Fugees' *Blunted on Reality* started gathering heat, so he says he threw the trio on as a supporting act. "I believe Pras was the first one who reached out to me," Henchmen says, "and he was like, 'Hey, we're Haitian, too, man, we need help!'"

Salt-N-Pepa

Very Necessary Help: Salt-N-Pepa were trying to make a comeback. "One day they were in the studio, because a friend of mine was dating Pepa, and I just showed up, put the beats on, let them run, and walked out of the room," Henchmen recalls. One of those beats was for "Shoop."

Staying Up Late: "I'm the one who put the producers and the writers with Aaliyah," says Henchmen about coordinating her last album. "I had endless nights in the studio with her, her mother, and Barry Hankerson's son. We all worked together to make *Aaliyah* happen."

Taking a Second Swing: "I was looking for a young, new Mary J. Blige who could give that soulful, hip hop kind of feeling," says Henchmen. "Sharissa had auditioned for me, and she had the inner voice—all the grittiness, all the soulfulness that I thought would work, so I ended up signing her."

For the Love of the Game: Sheek Louch joined Czar Entertainment less than a year ago, according to Henchmen. "Jadakiss called me one day and asked me could I do it," Henchmen says. "And I've always been a fan of the LOX. I'm not saying that Sheek is a charity case, but I'm not doing it for the money, I'm doing it more for the love of hip hop." *Leon Neyfakh*

FIGHT FOR LIFE: (From left) Henchmen with Mike Tyson in Memphis, 2003; Tupac being taken away in a stretcher following the November 30, 1994, shooting at Quad Recording Studios in Manhattan.

ian Jack" Agnant, was suspected (but never charged) of having had a role in the 1994 shooting of Tupac Shakur at the Quad Recording Studios in Times Square—was reportedly moved last December from a state penitentiary to a federal facility downtown and then back again, before a press report surfaced that the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York is reopening the Shakur-Quad case to see if the incident is related to Tupac's death. (A spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office declined to comment.) Henchmen has long denied any role in the Quad shooting, though Shakur himself clearly pointed an accusing finger at Henchmen. "The U.S. Attorney can investigate all they want," Henchmen says. "I'm used to that. I move like I'm being investigated. I never shook that. I just got off federal probation a year ago. I still think I gotta call the probation officer."

There is a heavy dose of hip hop theater when Henchmen speaks about himself in the present tense, but when remembering his past, he's somber and far less prone to exaggeration. Henchmen was raised in the shadows of the fearsome Vanderveer projects in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn and joined the street life in the late '70s after his Haitian immigrant parents—his father was a carpenter, his mother, a nurse's aide—were divorced. "When you're 13, it's a pivotal moment," Henchmen says, "and at that time, the fascination of the streets really caught me." Though barely in his teens, Henchmen got mixed up with violent Jamaican gangs like the Untouchables. Cops quickly caught up with him, and in 1983, the 17-year-old was arrested and hit with a number of charges ranging from weapons possession to murder. Eventually, he took a plea to assault in the first degree and was convicted of possession of a weapon with intent to use and sentenced to five to 10 years. It was in a juvenile facility that he met legendary Brooklyn hustler Kelvin Martin, the original 50 Cent, who impressed Henchmen with his wild, outsized tales of robbing aspiring rappers and liquor store owners in his Fort Greene neighborhood.

When Henchmen returned home in 1988, he went right back to the streets, lured by a thriving crack cocaine trade that he says was "on cruise control." Thanks to the street connects he'd made before he went to jail, Henchmen was able to enter the business at the wholesale level, moving kilos as well as ounces. On parole for five years after his release, he knew he was courting trouble, but, Henchmen says, "I refused to be broke." The high-stakes game ended badly. That summer, while he and a friend were delivering product to a house in Brooklyn, they were ambushed by AK-47-toting Jamaicans. Henchmen's Desert Eagle pistol was no match for their arsenal. "Wow," he remembers them telling him. "This is what you came to get us with?"

Outgunned and overpowered, Henchmen was led to a backyard garage, his wrists bound, while his friend remained tied up in the house. One gunman then tried to push Henchmen into his car—which had been moved to the garage—and ordered him to lie down. "The guy kept telling me, 'Get in the backseat and put your head down.' And I kinda knew that this dude was going to kill me," Henchmen says. "Then, by the grace of God, my hands started getting loose. When my hands got loose, I grabbed the gun. But I'm sitting down and he's standing up. He definitely had the advantage on me. The gun slipped away from me, and all I could do was get in the fetal position in the backseat of the car, and he emptied the .38 on me. I was shot here"—Henchmen points to his right hand—"here"—he points to his right arm—"and grazed here"—he points to his head. Believing Henchmen was mortally wounded, the shooter left him for dead.

"Thank God it wasn't a bigger firearm," Henchmen says with a laugh. If the gunman hadn't traded his AK-47 assault rifle for a .38 pistol, Henchmen would have been killed instantly. "I laid motionless for a little while until he was gone," he recalls, "and while I laid there, I heard one more shot fired, and I'm thinking they killed my friend. So, I jump out of the car and flag down some kid who takes me to the hospital." It turned out that Henchmen's pal had survived by an escape as dramatic as his own. "They took him around the back with my Desert Eagle, but they didn't know how to fire it," Henchmen says, "and he started running. By the time they figured it out, they fired a shot at him but he was gone."

The incident did for Henchmen what a murder charge and a five-year stint in juvie couldn't do—it weaned him from the streets. In 1990, Henchmen went legit, opening up a small storefront in Brooklyn called Rugged Auto Sound that sold car stereos and cell phones. Around that time, Jamaican friends introduced him to Peter Thomas,

SHAKUR: GARY MILLER/GLOBE PHOTOS

STAND AND DELIVER: 50 and the Game call a truce at their 2005 press conference in N.Y.C.; Vivica A. Fox with Jacques "Haitian Jack" Agnant at the 2004 Children Uniting Nations Oscar Gala in L.A.

a Jamaican club owner in Miami Beach who was booking hip hop acts like Naughty By Nature. Sensing opportunity, Henchmen joined forces with Thomas and his partner David Hyatt (who was repping R. Kelly) to throw a birthday party for Fab 5 Freddy. The party turned out to be so wildly popular that the trio made it an annual event. In 1993, they dubbed the shindig "How Can I Be Down?" because it seemed as though the entire hip hop world wanted to attend. The event helped establish Miami Beach as a party mecca and became a major meeting point for the scene's power brokers. "'How Can I Be Down?' catapulted many, many careers, including my own," says former Interscope honcho Steve Stoute, now CCO of Translation Consulting and Brand Imaging. "This is where hip hop's major players who would shape the '90s came together," says Grouchy Greg Watkins, cofounder of *allhiphop.com*. "It was where you saw a young Biggie, a young Puffy, a young Tupac, and even the West Coast guys like Suge Knight and Dr. Dre."

Sensing that producers-cum-entrepreneurs like Diddy would soon be as important as rappers, Henchmen founded Henchmen Productions, an umbrella company that represented hip hop and R&B artists and producers. Henchmen's first hit came in 1993 with Salt-N-Pepa's "Shoop," which was produced by one of his producers, Mark Sparks. That year, Henchmen signed Groove Theory to Epic and also formed lasting relationships with Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur.

Henchmen has not spoken publicly about his friendship with Tupac, nor about the shooting at Quad Recording Studios that 'Pac accused him of being a part of. He says he agreed to speak about both with VIBE now for one reason. "I want this shit to get behind me," he says. "I want it to be talked about enough that motherfuckers aren't even interested anymore."

Henchmen first met Tupac in 1992, but they really got to know each other when Shakur was shooting *Above the Rim* in New York. "Tupac said, 'Hey, man, let's hang out,'" Henchmen remembers. "He introduced me to Madonna. We were doing some serious hanging out." In turn, Henchmen introduced 'Pac to Agnant, a friend from his hustling days in Brooklyn. Tupac was so taken with the flashy Haitian Jack (who, according to Henchmen, "had the jewelry, the diamonds, the cars, the crew") that he told friends he was studying the hustler's every move to prepare for (CONTINUED ON PAGE 220)

CRIMINAL-MINDED

THEIR CLIENTS RAP ABOUT IT, BUT THESE MANAGERS LIVE IT.

MARION "SUGE" KNIGHT
Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Tupac Shakur, Petey Pablo
Rap sheet: While Knight never formally set-tripped, the OG has a penchant for wearing blood red and employing strong-arm tactics, whether it's reportedly brandishing a pipe at a business meeting or joining his artists in a good old-fashioned gangland stomping.

IRV "GOTTI" LORENZO
Ja Rule, Ashanti
Rap sheet: This DJ turned producer grew up with Kenneth McGriff, founder of the Jamaica, Queens, "Supreme Team" syndicate. In January, Gotti pleaded not guilty to federal charges that he laundered McGriff's drug money through his label, The Inc. No trial date has been set.

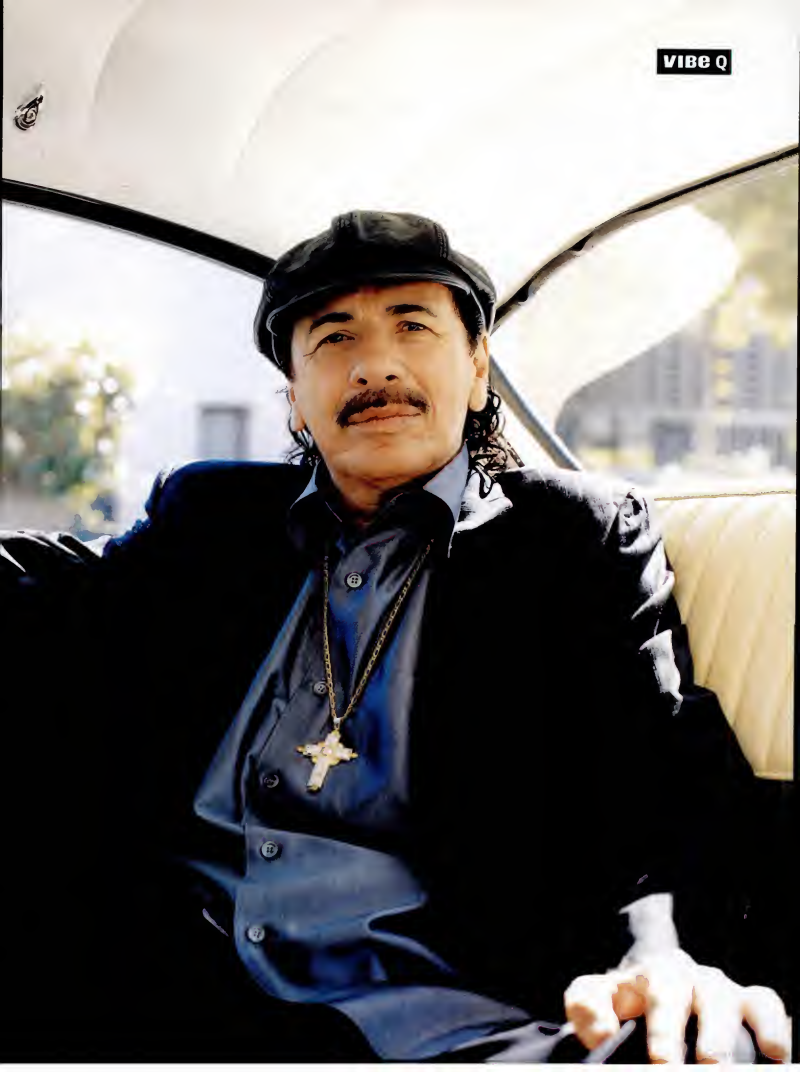
CHRIS LIGHTY
50 Cent, Mobb Deep, Busta Rhymes
Rap sheet: This boogie-down Bronxster ran the streets with the infamous Violators gang and has a history of being at the wrong place at the wrong time, like the shooting death of DJ Scott La Rock in 1987.

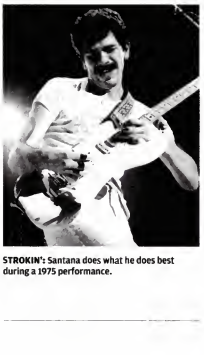
CHAZ "SLIM" WILLIAMS
50 Cent, Grafh
Rap sheet: One of 50 Cent's first managers, Williams did a 15-year stretch in federal prison after a conviction for the attempted murder of two police officers as well as for bank robberies. Williams used his time behind bars to network with various inmates and launched Black Hand Entertainment upon his release. *Jayson Rodriguez*

50 CENT, GAME: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE; FOX, AGNANT: ARNOLD TURNER/WIREIMAGE; GOTTI: THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE

THE RING MASTER

CARLOS SANTANA HAS DEFTLY AVERTED THE PATH OF THE DINOSAUR ROCK STAR BY JUGGLING MUSICAL GENRES, DEFYING BOUNDARIES, AND KEEPING HIS IDEALS AND SPIRITUALITY IN FOCUS. **OLIVER WANG** SEARCHES FOR AN OLD MASTER'S FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH. PHOTOGRAPHS BY VERITY SMITH





STROKIN': Santana does what he does best during a 1975 performance.

CARLOS SANTANA'S STUDIO and offices are tucked away on an industrial block, the kind that usually houses kitchen-faucet wholesalers or lumber yards, in San Rafael, Calif., about half an hour north of San Francisco. There's enough audio equipment stacked around to put Guitar Center out of business, and a small parade of big men brings crates in and out of the massive delivery doors. It's only 10 a.m., but a second stick of incense is already burning inside the studio. The patchouli scent and the sound insulation give the room an air of calm, and it's easy not to notice Santana sitting quietly in a side office, patiently waiting, legs stretched and crossed. For someone who's sold more than 32 million albums in the last six years alone, he's a study in earthy modesty: brown cap, brown shirt, brown pants. A simple silver medallion drapes his neck, and only his feet betray a hint of style: a pair of Nike Supreme Vandals, but no socks. Santana, 58, speaks like he dresses—easygoing and comfortably—his voice accented less by a childhood in Mexico and more by his teenage years spent in San Francisco's Mission District. // More conspicuous is Santana's spiritual grounding—almost every response points to a greater understanding of self or consciousness of others. He's fond of aphorisms, some profound, some offbeat. "I'm not just the squirrel or a monkey or a rhino, I am the whole zoo," Santana will say. He's like the favorite uncle you see at holidays—congenial, contemplative, yet unflinchingly candid when necessary, especially considering his strange, serendipitous career of 40 years.

Santana came onto the national stage by performing at Woodstock in the summer of '69, and since then, he and his bands have produced more than 30 albums, yet most casual listeners can name only a few. The most famous is Santana's second album, 1970's *Abraxas*. Even if the title doesn't ring a bell, the songs will: "Oye Como Va" and "Black Magic Woman/Gypsy Queen."

Abraxas, with its pounding Latin rhythms, dissonant rock riffs, and the distinctive cries of his guitar, was how most first heard Santana, including producer Dante Ross. "He was the only rock group I remember getting play in my 'hood," says Ross. "His band's ensemble sound was almost like Latino P-Funk." As a Latino superstar in American music, "Santana tore down barriers and showed people how to express themselves no matter what your ethnic background is," Ross says.

Santana went on to record dozens of other albums, including well-regarded experiments in jazz-rock-fusion that sounded nothing like his signature Latin rock of the early '70s. It wasn't until 1999, however, that he was able to transcend his past and come full force into the present. Overseen by the mighty Clive Davis, Santana's collaboration-driven *Supernatural* produced two number one singles ("Smooth" and "Maria Maria"), sold more than 15 million copies nationally, and all but swept the 42nd Annual Grammy Awards.

It's not just the fans who are clamoring for Santana these days. In recruiting talent for the new album, *All That I Am*, Davis's selections include rockers Michelle Branch and Steven Tyler, but also a number of contemporary R&B, dancehall, and hip hop artists, from Anthony Hamilton to Sean Paul. Santana compares these diverse collaborations to an eclectic circus show: "It's like Cirque du Soleil. It's not out of the realm of possibility for me to work with Justin Timberlake or Placido Domingo."

Taking a timeout at his San Rafael headquarters, Santana sat down with VIBE to discuss his career, family, spirituality, and how it is that someone once dubbed "the most famous Mexican in the world" can say that, deep inside, he's also a "black motherfucker."

VIBE: *All That I Am* is the third album built off what Clive Davis describes as "an architectural blueprint," pairing you with contemporary singers and songwriters. Other critics have called it a formula or even a gimmick.

To me, it's an opportunity, an approach, not a formula, a gimmick, a gadget. I'll just say it flat out, man: Elton John, Mick Jagger, and a few other guys tried this so-called formula, and it didn't work. I try to bring clarity, honesty, sincerity, and soulfulness to whatever is in front of me. And if I don't hear myself in it, I say, Send it to John Mellencamp, it's not me. It's a number one song, but it ain't me.

Has it been challenging to find the right partners?

I don't have no complaints, no regrets, nothing like that. I'm just

IAN MCKSON/REDFERNS/RETNA

BLACK MAGIC:
"When I want my music to be a little deeper, I go to Otis Redding, Albert King, the Stax sound, because they weren't afraid to be black. The blacker the better."

really grateful. Prince asked me, 'cause he was really curious, "How did you guys create this *Supernatural* thing, what's the deal?"

Wait, Prince is asking you this?

Yeah. And I say, Okay, since you asked, I'll tell you: Clive just showed me a bunch of menus and said, "What do you want to have?" And I was like, Bam! I'll take some of that Lauryn Hill, and some of that Rob Thomas, and some of that Wyclef Jean. It's just menus, nobody forced me to do anything. It's an offering–accepting people's hearts and then complement what they bring to the table. People bring you their hearts, either writing a song or singing on a song, you know?

ROCK WITH ME: Beyoncé and Santana tear it up at the 2003 Super Bowl pregame show in San Diego.

On the new album, you work with Mary J. Blige, Big Boi, Anthony Hamilton, Sean Paul, and will.i.am. Is such a heavy concentration of urban artists by coincidence or design?

It was my request. I looked point blank at Clive and said, We need to get more black. I love everything that we're doing, but I want to go to the other side of the tracks, too. Because, there's a part of me ... [points to the beige skin on his hand] ... my skin is like my mom's, but I'm a black motherfucker, man, you know? I grew up with Donny Hathaway and Marvin Gaye. I need to have that sound, not only in my body, but coming out the speakers, for the rest of the people.

> "I DON'T CARE HOW MANY **CDS WE SELL.** I JUST WANT TO PENETRATE THE NEXT NOTE."

People talk a lot about your rock and jazz influences but not what you got out of rhythm and blues, even though you came of age in the 1960s, a golden era for soul.

I was deeply affected by Curtis Mayfield. I thought he wrote the best hymns. When I want my music to be a little darker and deeper, I go into Otis Redding, 'cause sometimes Motown will get a little candy, a little too cute. I love most of Motown, 80 or 90 percent, but I go to Otis Redding, Albert King, the Stax sound, because they weren't afraid to be black. I like it–the blacker the better for me.

That might strike some as an unusual comment coming from someone so identified with the Mexican/Chicano community.

I've been criticized a lot by certain Mexican people because they feel that I turned my back on them. And my answer to them is, I came from the heart of Mexico, but I can't just put on a mariachi suit and just play that music. I played that music when I was 6, you know? You can't measure how Mexican I am by how many tamales or enchiladas I eat. I'm not just the squirrel or a monkey or a rhino, I am the whole zoo.

What do you mean?

What I discovered, and it's a choice for you and anyone else who is reading this magazine, is that you can be stuck just being the toilet paper in the Safeway, or you can be the whole store. Why don't you just be what God intended you to be, which is a multidimensional spirit with possibilities and opportunities.

You credit Brazilian guitarist Boia Sete for teaching you about achieving "an inner sound." What does that mean to you?

I told Diana Ross this about three days ago: You wet your finger, point it up to the sky, the angels kiss it, and then you hear the inner sound. It's like the first time you jump butt-naked into a swimming pool. It's dangerous, you don't know if you're going to stay up and float or if you can swim. But the exhilaration of discovering that

AXE APPEAL

Some of VIBE's other favorite guitarists.

JIMI HENDRIX: His music exuded blackness, but his popularity transcended color. In life, Hendrix was one of the most influential guitarists of all time, and in death, he remains a powerful icon of rebellious spirit. His blues-inflected style had a razor edge, like his infamous rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner," which sliced the anthem to ribbons.
Listen to: *Are You Experienced?* (1967)

PRINCE: Minnesota's finest has always had our love, whether he was kicking game to Apollonia, singing about "Darling Nikki," or drizzling down "Diamonds and Pearls." Short in height but long on talent, Prince can chug a power chord or pluck a sweet baiiad with equal flair.
Listen to: *Purple Rain* (1984)

LENNY KRAVITZ: He started out as a Shuggie Otis-like, boho talent who married Lisa Bonet. But Kravitz has since remade himself into the rock equivaient of a blinged-out rap star, complete with Hollywood hair, sunglasses, and smile. When he's not hanging with Diddy or Jay-Z, Kravitz channels the spirits of Jimmy Page, Curtis Mayfield, and Hendrix through his instrument.
Listen to: *Are You Gonna Go My Way* (1993)

JOHN MAYER: What is it about Mayer that has Dave Chappelle, Common, Kanye West, and others sweating him harder than the Game does Dr. Dre? Maybe it's his light, drifting sound (think folk, not funk), his goofy and sensitive white-boy charm, or the blue-eyed soulfulness of his songwriting.
Listen to: *Heavier Things* (2003)

SLASH: Don't front, you know all the words to Guns N' Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine." Back in the day, when none of the heads were looking, you'd wild out to Slash's ear-tearing riffs and try to mimic Axl Rose's screeching on "Welcome to the Jungle."
Listen to: *Appetite for Destruction* (1987) *O.W.*

BEYONCÉ, SANTANA: ADRIAN LATIF/REUTERS/CORBIS; HENDRIX: DAVID BEDFORD/REDFERNS/RETNA

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inner sound is very rewarding. It's like what Marvin Gaye did with *What's Going On*, Miles did with *Kind of Blue*, Jimi did with his first three albums, Bob Marley & the Wailers did with *Exodus*.

How do you find that space?

It helps to have a lobotomy, a conscious lobotomy. That's what meditating is, to get a lobotomy. I was blessed to be born with a permanent lobotomy, because I never really gave a shit what people thought. That's being in your mind too much. I don't care about how many CDs we sell or don't sell. I leave that to the lawyers and the accountants. I just want to penetrate the next note.

BESAME: Santana and wife, Deborah, show love at the Academy Awards in 2005.

It seems that you and your wife Deborah's spirituality manifests itself in a more concrete way in your philanthropy. For example, she mentioned that through the Milagro Foundation you founded together, you donated your entire 2003 summer tour profits to ANSA [Artists for a New South Africa].

One of the greatest joys of my life was to give $2.5 million, clean, to Mr. Desmond Tutu, for my sisters and brothers in Africa. I don't know these people personally, but hopefully, they can have better food, better clothing, better books. That, to me, is the win-win situation.

You two started Milagro in 1998, before your career resurgence. What spurred you then?

Youngsters. We really care for the youngsters to have choices and possibilities and opportunities with education. For me and Deborah, this is an opportunity for us to really fulfill a promise we made

"I WANT DIGNITY, GRACE, BEAUTY, ELEGANCE, EXCELLENCE, AND A WHOLE **LOT OF FUN.**"

to God: When I come to this planet, if you let me eat cheesecake and a hot dog, make love, get ink on my hands, in return, I promise to do my best to make it a better world.

Speaking of youngsters, according to Clive Davis, prior to planning for *Supernatural*, you told him, "I want to return to music that my daughters can hear played on the radio."

It's true. A big part of it was because all we heard from Santana from '73 to '98 was just the old stuff…just "Oye Como Va," "Black Magic Woman." They never played anything new that I did.

Your oldest son and daughter are in their early 20s, and you also have a teenage daughter. Do you play an active role in what they listen to?

I have no control over what they do or don't listen to, as long as it's not vulgar, demeaning, degrading, you know? At the San Diego Zoo, they used to have a glass cage because the monkey would shit on his hand and throw it at you. It may be funny, but I don't want it in my house. All music is good as long as the consciousness is high. The only thing I don't want in my house is trash: white trash, black trash, any kind of trash. I want dignity, grace, beauty, elegance, excellence, and a whole lot of fun. I wish the people who did *Being Bobby Brown* would spend the same amount of money on Arthur Ashe, Jesse Owens, Harry Belafonte, and Quincy Jones.

Notions of what "entertainment" is have changed, though.

Like I said, then go to the zoo and put the camera on the monkey who throws shit at your face. It's the same. The time is very short on this planet, and I think that we're capable of investing money to pull up in consciousness so that we can stop the violence in the streets and in Iraq. That's what I want to use music for, not for entertainment or show business purposes. I was around when James Brown did that concert in Boston after the riots when they killed Martin Luther King Jr. That's why I go that way. Pull up man, pull up.

HIGH TUNES

Dust off your air guitar, and strum along to this selection of soulful Santana songs for the hip hop and R&B aficionado.

"Black Magic Woman/Gypsy Queen" (1970): Trip out to this classic psychedelic Afro-Latin odyssey.

"Batuka" (1971): African congas, cowbells, and of course, that banging guitar all evoke blaxploitation-era funk.

"To Zion" (1998): This emotional paean to Lauryn's seed debuted on *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*.

"Put Your Lights On" (1999): A bluesy confessional that spurred a career-changing moment for former House of Pain front man Everlast.

"Do You Like the Way" (1999): Cee-Lo's gutbucket vocals warm up Lauryn Hill's precise breath control.

Santana, Clive Davis, and Wyclef Jean

"Maria Maria" (1999): The Product G&B shout out "Spanish Harlem" to a crisp boom bap on this Santana collabo produced by Wyclef Jean and Jerry "Wonder" Duplessis.

"Nothing at All" (2002): Neo-soulchild Musiq sings about heartbreak as Santana picks out a Spanish melody.

"You Are My Kind" (2002): Seal cameos on this breezy pop/rock confection that's perfect for lounging poolside.

"Amoré (Sexo)" (2002): Macy Gray's unmistakable voice gets spicy on this sexy dish that blends salsa and merengue rhythms.

"Son's Gonna Rise" (2004): Citizen Cope's head-bopping, on-the-road testimony sits well with Santana's signature rock breaks on *The Clarence Greenwood Recordings*. *Abena Agyeman-Fisher*

SANTANA: ION GAELLI/WIREIMAGE; SANTANA, DAVIS, JEAN: LARRY BUSACCA/RETNA

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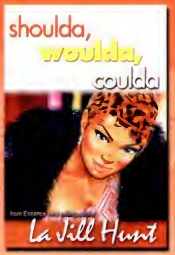

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CATER TO YOU

Not sure what gifts to buy your spoiled loved ones this holiday season? Our guide has great ideas for some of the most luxurious, fun, and unexpected presents. We even threw in a few extras for you to keep for yourself. You'll deserve it after all that shopping! **By Beverly Smith.** Photographs by Greg Broom

THE CAT'S MEOW
Platinum and diamond panther pendant by **Cartier;** black-and-white chevron chinchilla printed rabbit throw by **Adrienne Landau.**

For Her (from upper left): Cigno diamond pendant necklace by **Movado;** gold nougat hoops by **Dior Fine Jewelry;** turntable pendant by **Swatch Bijoux;** talisman bracelet and gold power ring, both by **Diane von Furstenberg** by **H.Stern;** teardrop-shape diamond signature earrings with pink topaz briolettes and diamond dog tag, all by **Baby Phat Fine Jewelry;** gold heart tag necklace by **Tiffany & Co.;** silver double-band bracelet by **Emporio Armani;** teddy bear charm necklace, chocolate cheetah ring, and diamond knuckle ring, all by **Baby Doll Gems;** star earrings with multicolored gems by **H.Stern.**

For Him (from upper left): Link ring and rose gold and rubber bracelet, both by **Simmons Jewelry Co. Men's Collection;** square double-C cuff links and dog tag with leather necklace, all by **Cartier;** rose gold and silver zigzag rings, silver link chain necklace, and green, gold, and diamond cuff links (upper right), all by **Marisa Perry;** gold identity cuff links and gold identity ring (bottom), all by **H.Stern;** silver coin-edge tag pendant and silver ID bracelet, both by **Tiffany & Co.;** stainless steel and enamel cuff links by **J. Lindeberg;** silver link bracelet by **Emporio Armani.**

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For Her (from left): Tortoise shell ring-watch by **Michael Kors;** show girl fashion watch by **Baby Phat Fashion Watches;** diamond cocktail watch by **Tiffany & Co.;** charm bracelet watch by **Gucci;** metallic gold champagne watch by **DKNY;** Christal watch by **Dior** by **John Galliano;** dolce diamond mirror watch by **Movado.**

For Him (upper left): Dumont watch by **Cartier;** rubber and stainless-steel watch with diamond markers by **Concord;** black chrono signature watch by **Gucci;** (bottom left) chronograph stainless-steel watch with gold finish by **Michael Kors;** stainless-steel check-etching watch by **Burberry;** rattle-snake-trony watch by **Swatch;** stainless-steel diamond-set crystal spinner watch by **G Unit.**

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Champagne by **Piper-Heidsieck;** wine cooler and coasters with holder, available at **W Hotels;** sampler pack of four scotch whiskies by **Johnnie Walker;** HQ liqueur by **Hpnotiq;** vodka and martini glass, both by **Ciroc;** tumbler and decanter with top, both by **Crate & Barrel;** strawberry kiwi infusion by **Rémy Red;** N° Ten gin by **Tanqueray;** tequila by **Jose Cuervo Especial;** vodka by **Belvedere;** whiskey by **Crown Royal Special Reserve;** brown tray and folding base, both by **Armani Casa.**

pyrighted material

For Her: Long beige mink coat by **House of Dereon;** Dasha Coyote boots by **Ralph Lauren;** brown and cream fur scarf by **Pologeorgis;** dark brown faux fur by **Banana Republic;** white fur purse with silver sequins and black fur shrug, both by **AIX Armani Exchange;** brown and black fur trapper hat by **Denimaxx.**

For Him: Norsette shearling coat by **YSL;** cream and gray fur scarf by **D&G;** tan knit and fur zip sweater by **Bottega Veneta;** brown scarf with fringe by **Boss Black;** long black fur coat by **Giorgio Armani;** white fur trapper with tail by **Pologeorgis.**

Globo bookcase by **Armani Casa;** teal, oasis, and amethyst vases, all by **Crate & Barrel;** fruit holder, available at **W Hotels;** red and green suede magnetic frames, both by **Burberry;** checkered frame by **Armani Casa;** red blanket by **Banana Republic;** orange, navy, and green leather paper trays, all by **Rudi Rabitti;** 3-piece tealight holders by **Bottega Veneta;** red Heart² crystal vase by **Movado;** crystal Atlas ice bucket by **Tiffany & Co.**

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Denim jeans by **Levi's;** brown croc belt by **Marisa Perry;** gray blazer with military patches by **Calvin Klein Jeans;** gray knit hat with blue stripes by **Old Navy;** black and gold pillow by **MTV Cribs** for **JCPenney;** dark brown leather duffle bag by **Louis Vuitton;** gray V-neck wool sweater with beading by **D&G;** patent leather sneakers by **Jordan;** butterscotch cashmere-lined leather gloves by **Banana Republic.**

Gold brocade jacket by **DKNY Jeans Juniors;** orange fur throw by **Adrienne Landau;** python clutch with stones by **YSL;** large white handbag and tortoise-shell shoes, all by **Dior** by **John Galliano;** welt jewel belt by **Miss Sixty;** animal gloves by **Banana Republic;** gold sequin pillow by **MTV Cribs** for **JCPenney;** denim miniskirt by **Request.** See The Details, page 224.

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NEW SNOOP DOGG ALBUM COMING SOON

REVOLUTIONS

FLOETRY

FLO'OLOGY

GEFFEN

BY LAURA CHECKOWAY

There's no doubt that Marsha Ambrosius (the Songstress) and Natalie Stewart (the Floacist) share a natural musical spark when they join forces to become Floetry. With their third offering, *Flo'Ology*, the duo's sound is more sophisticated than ever, oozing a touch of class that is lacking among their sex-peddling contemporaries. But there is also something to be said here about (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Illustration by **MICHELLE CHANG**

their spoken word-meets-neo-soul approach wearing out its welcome. Although their chemistry is undeniable, the Floacist's pseudo-spiritual verses are easily outshined by the Songstress's gorgeous vocals.

Ambrosius and Stewart, however, radiate an empowering self-awareness, no longer victims suffering from love's growing pains, but active participants in the progression. Instead of expressing the headaches, hatred, and heartbreak that women are so accustomed to, and attached to, in song, the lead single, "SupaStar," truly honors love, without hesitation. Floetry puts its special someone on a pedestal while predictable (yet befitting) choice Common joins in to "dream of a love supreme" over Scott Storch's melodic, mid-tempo keys. As Ambrosius sings, "My love is honest and true and I can prove it," Stewart falls short in her attempt to match Common's level of lyricism.

While the interaction of two different vocal styles is what makes Floetry distinct, Ambrosius's voice is strong, breathy, and beautiful enough to carry an entire album on her own. She rubs up real nice against the dancehall-tinged drums on "Closer," a flirty, don't-fight-the-feeling song slightly weighed down by Stewart's sultry yet unsubstantial wordplay. The Ambrosius-produced "Feelings" is a vulnerable, private ballad about catching feelings. Backed by a piano, Ambrosius's emotive alto digs deep inside and lingers there for five heart-gripping minutes.

Flo'Ology's soothing musicality is a comforting escape.

Even while we long for more soul and less flo', the pair comes together brilliantly on the album's most intimate moment, "Lay Down." The Floacist's sexy sweet-talk meandering alongside the Songstress's coos is the perfect complement here. The equally sensual "Imagination" encourages a lover to do whatever, go wherever, over Raphael Saadiq's well-crafted bells and bass. Ambrosius sings, "I'm your favorite memory, remember me...I'm your favorite melody, listen to me."

Having penned proven songs for Michael Jackson ("Butterflies") and Styles P (the chorus on "I'm Black"), among others, Floetry makes an ill-judged attempt at covering Bob Marley & the Wailers' "Waiting in Vain." Ambrosius barely carries the vintage unrequited-love tune beside Stewart's superfluous ad-libs. The couple is better served when it delves further into its own emotional intricacies of relationships. "Don't Know What 2 Say" finds the pair tongue-tied over a crush and not knowing how to come clean, while "I'll Die" is an empowering anthem about leaving when part of you wants to stay.

The range of emotions explored on *Flo'Ology* spans love's many-splintered spectrum. Torn feelings of uncertainty reach beyond the musical content here, because it's hard to believe in much when hurricanes and frightening government disregard are sinking and tearing apart lives. But Floetry will make you believe in love, allegiance, sisterhood, and those special sparks. And while they may not inspire you to rise up or start the revolution, their soothing sounds are sure to help get you through the night.

STAMP OF APPROVAL

CERTIFIED...

CLASSIC	(V)(V)(V)(V)(V)
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HEAT	(V)(V)(V)
SUSPECT	(V)(V)
FRISBEE	(V)

LIL' KIM
THE NAKED TRUTH
ATLANTIC
(V)(V)(V)(V)(V)

The Lil' one puts forth one B.I.G. effort.

After serving two years as fodder for tabloids and diss records, Lil' Kim strikes back with *The Naked Truth*. Here, she retaliates against critics, enemies, and the criminal justice system. With scathing lyricism and infectious beats, *Truth* validates the Queen Bee's position as the definitive rap vixen.

Vengeance heats up on the bell-rocking "Spell Check," where Kim slams the snitches: "I'm more nigga than them bitch-ass guys / 'Cause they took the stand on the DA's side."

Indeed, Kim has never lacked the flow, rhyming skill, or bravado of her male counterparts.

EXTRA! EXTRA!
Kim once worked as a Bloomingdale's sales rep.

And she cleverly borrows from a few: from the slick interpolation of Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley's "Welcome to Jamrock" ("Lighters Up") to the brooding "Quiet," where Kim adopts Eminem's signature flow to sting her rivals. And as is habitual for Kim, she flips a Notorious B.I.G. quotable to prove a point. On the street-stomping "All Good," which also samples Biggie's "Juicy," she boasts: "Damn right I love the life I live / 'Cause I went from negative to positive." And with this classic form of payback, it's all good. *Rondell Conway*

CERTIFIED FRESH

OUT THE BOX
Beyond hip hop and R&B

> **FRANZ FERDINAND, *YOU COULD HAVE IT SO MUCH BETTER*** **(Epic)** The fashionable rockers reinvent '80s Brit pop as something beyond nostalgia. Though it lacks some of the debut album's atmosphere, their sophomore LP overflows with danceable beats and catchy hooks.

> **STIFFED, *BURNED AGAIN*** **(Outlook Music)** Hot off their indie EP success, these Philly natives release a fuzz-tinged collection of punk, pop, and funk, where lead singer Santi White's Debbie Harry-meets-Gwen Stefani vocals lend vulnerability to the riff-heavy instrumentals.

> **CABAS, *PURO CABAS*** **(EMI)** With the help of production legend Kike Santander (Gloria Estefán, David Bisbal), Colombian singer/songwriter Cabas serves up his own smorgasbord of sounds from his country's Caribbean coast.

> **AUDIO BULLYS, *GENERATION*** **(Astralwerks)** These two London lads emerge from the underground by combining hip hop bars with house and garage and sampling left-field cuts to create a nonconformist, futuristic sound.

BOOMSHOTS

Reggae Riddims & Reality BY ROB KENNER

"The bar have to be raised now," says 22-year-old Jeffrey Campbell, professionally known as **ASSASSIN,** just before opening a concert for New York's Hot 97 radio station. "Especially now that this music is making a bigger impression. We have to put the onus on ourselves to make it happen." One of the sharpest young lyricists in the dancehall fraternity, Assassin is certainly fulfilling his responsibility. And when he bounces off into the spotlight chanting "bang-biddy-bang-bang-bang," he's got the gleam of a hungry tiger in his eye.

Assassin

Although he now believes that he was "ordained" to be a dancehall artist, for most of his life, Assassin never imagined that music could be a livelihood, much less a way to provide for his family. "It was a dream," he recalls. "Like, Jah know, me could imagine deejaying for a stadium full of people." But Campbell's parents always emphasized the importance of education for their children, so he relegated his lyrical gift to hobby status.

All that changed in 1999 when he was still a student at Camperdown High School in Kingston, alma mater of dancehall giant Spragga Benz. It was there that Assassin earned his lethal nickname by dominating daily schoolyard contests. His greatest challenge came from Spragga's nephew Briggy. Their ongoing competition inspired Assassin to write a tune called "Big Up All the Shotta Dem," which Spragga recorded on the mighty Street Sweeper *riddim*.

Hearing his lyrics playing on the radio inspired Assassin to pursue his dancehall destiny. As a member of Spragga's Red Square Crew, he became the first artist to voice on the massive Diwali *riddim*, earning international airplay with his song "Ruffest & Tuffest." Judging by his debut album, *Infiltration* (VP), that early boast was well founded. Along with many of his best-known hits—"As a Man," "Girls Gone Wild," and "Step Pon Dem"—the album boasts solid new tunes like "Free at Last" and "Respect Due," Assassin's shout-out to the veterans who paved the way for him.

Aiming to represent Jamaican music in the best possible light, the CD contains no clue that Assassin spent some of last year mired in a war of words with Vybz Kartel. "I'm not getting dragged down into that," Assassin observes. "We need to produce material that can be competitive on an international level. The more time we waste is the more them have us as banana republicans. We can't afford for that to happen."

HEAVY ROTATION

NAZARENES *Songs of Life* (Heartbeat)
JOSEPH ISRAEL *Gone Are the Days* (Lions of Israel Inc.)
VARIOUS ARTISTS *World Jam* (Greensleeves)
WARRIOR KING *Hold the Faith* (VP)
TWIN OF TWINS *The Resurrection of the Ghetto: Stir It Up Vol. 6* (Kingston 13)

HEAR THIS!

"Sometimes in this business, you need something to keep you rooted, and Bob always does that."—**ADEWALE AKINNUOVE-AGBAJE,** costar of *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, on **BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS'** *UPRISING*

ASSASSIN: MARLON "AJAMU" MYRIE; AKINNUOVE-AGBAJE: ALBERT L. ORTEGA/WIREIMAGE

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STYLES P
TIME IS MONEY
INTERSCOPE

The Ghost still possesses the mic on his sophomore LP.

Styles P wants a minute of your time. While his '02 debut, *A Gangster and a Gentleman*, mapped out his conscious criminology, flat production prevented the LOX middleman from making a lasting impression. On *Time Is Money*, Styles (aka the Ghost) finds his place between style and substance.

Over Kanye West's vintage breaks on "Testify," Styles channels Donald Goines, attacking the mic with gangster poetry. Then, on the simmering Sizzla duet "Fire & Pain," he eulogizes: "When I pass the cemetery where my little brother is buried / All I can do is salute, pound on my chest / God got his army, and we all his recruits." And with help from Scott Storch and Lil Jon ("One Cup, Two Cup" and "Can U Believe It," respectively), he finds a happy medium, mixing his grimy raps with dance floor–rattling bass.

Occasionally, there are missteps, like the lukewarm response to 50 Cent's "Piggy Bank" ("Shots Fired"), where Styles obsesses over an old beef. *Time*'s best moments, though, come when the Ghost drops his fists and focuses inward for inspiration.

Brendan Frederick

EXTRA! EXTRA!
In high school, Styles P honed his storytelling by writing plays.

MILESTONES
Five albums that changed BUN B'S life.

> **PUBLIC ENEMY, *YO! BUM RUSH THE SHOW*** (Def Jam, 1987) I was listening to shit like "Miuzi Weighs a Ton" without catching the subtext. The bass was so jamming that I didn't really understand the level they were on until their second album.

> **BIG DADDY KANE, *LONG LIVE THE KANE*** (Cold Chillin', 1988) No one mistook Kane for anything less than a G. He proved that just because you are a G, it doesn't mean you have to dress like one.

> **GETO BOYS, *MAKING TROUBLE*** (Rap-A-Lot, 1988) I didn't know you could make an album outside of New York and L.A. This showed me that I could do it, too.

> **ICE CUBE, *AMERIKKKA'S MOST WANTED*** (Priority, 1990) N.W.A without Cube didn't make sense. With this album, I understood how much of a role he played in shaping N.W.A.

> **SCARFACE, *THE DIARY*** (Rap-A-Lot, 1994) This CD made me realize I was never gonna be number one. At my best, I was gonna be number two. And I'm okay with that.

GINUWINE
BACK II DA BASICS
SONY URBAN/EPIC

Older, wiser, and sexier: Ginuwine matures.

For Ginuwine, the metamorphosis from horny bachelor into smoldering balladeer is still in progress. His fifth release, *Back II da Basics*—which builds on his silky vocals while keeping the sexual innuendo intact—proves he's slowly but surely growing up.

But the soul man misfires when he attempts to cast a youthful sheen on his maturing career, as on the generic "The Club." Unlike his earlier uptempos produced by Timbaland, these bass-heavy joints disrupt an otherwise tender collection. Similarly wanting, "She's Like" mindlessly borrows from his 2003 ode to denim, "In Those Jeans," with inane lyrics like: "I'm diggin' your 7 jeans and your Baby Phat."

Most notably, Ginuwine challenges the typical bump-and-grind repertoire of his younger R&B counterparts by differentiating between love and lust. On "Far Away," his whisper-soft tenor soars into falsetto as he details the agony of a dying relationship. "Betta Half" is more optimistic as he praises the woman who completes him to soft, tinkling keys. Despite the occasional growing pains, when Ginuwine acts his age, it's a graceful and erotic experience.

Imani A. Dawson

EXTRA! EXTRA!

Ginuwine once worked as a Michael Jackson impressionist.

FREE AGENT
VIBE's unsigned draft pick

> **NAME:** Latia (née Latia Tucker)
> **AGE:** 21
> **HOMETOWN:** Rochester, N.Y.
> **GENRE:** R&B
> **FAVORITE ALBUM:** *Rapture*, Anita Baker
> **DREAM COLLABO:** Faith Evans

Latia Tucker's all business. The Hampton University marketing major called our office about six times to make sure her CD had been properly considered. "The more times you say your name, the more they'll remember you," says Tucker. Even if you do forget her name, you'll likely remember her gospel-tinged vocals. On "My Window," a power ballad with lush chords, the singer grapples with and eventually overcomes the demons of emotional abuse. "If there's a glitch in your life, you can still flip it," she says. The song is based on her own hardships with a former love. Things got so bad, she even gave up singing temporarily, which she still can't believe. "As long as I have a voice, I'll never stop singing again," she says. As long as she keeps hitting the right notes, her name will stay fresh in our minds.

> **BE THE JUDGE:** Hear tracks at *vibe.com*.

Jayson Rodriguez

A/B CONVERSATION

Fly tracks or wack wax? Ask our critics, A/B.

> "UNBREAKABLE," ALICIA KEYS (J)

A: Oooweee! Go 'head Alicia!
B: That's right, unbreakable, like Will and Jada, like Oprah and Stedman.
A: Ain't black love beautiful? Woooo! Sing girl. Sang!
B: Yeah, but she forgot Whitney and Bobby.
A: (Sigh) Please don't mess up my groove right now.

> "I'M A G," N.O.R.E. (Def Jam)

A: Hey, N.O.R.E.-styled lyrics are in now, huh?
B: Don't hate, he helped make the Neptunes famous.
A: But this sounds like hip hop polka.
B: Well bust out your clogs, 'cause it's a hit.

> "FIREMAN," LIL WAYNE (Universal)

A: Lil Weezie really is on fire.
B: He's making New Orleanians everywhere proud.
A: Well, it's no "I Believe I Can Fly," but he's still an inspiration.
B: Whatd'ya know, the hot boy is now a Fireman.

> "EVERYTIME I THINK ABOUT HER," JAHEIM, FEAT. JADAKISS (Warner Bros.)

B: Keys ain't the only one sangin' these days. G'head, Jaheim.
A: If anyone can honor Luther's memory, it's Jah.
B: Yeah, but he's got a more ghetto edge.
A: Hence, the uncalled-for Jada verse.
B: Bet he'd never forget Whitney and Bobby.

HEAR THIS!

"I listen to music for the feeling, not necessarily words, and her songs give you a good feeling."
—MARQUES HOUSTON, costar of *Trapped*, on HILARY DUFF'S *METAMORPHOSIS*

AVANT
DIRECTOR
GEFFEN

Three albums deep, and Avant remains relatively faceless in the crowd of R&B crooners. This time around, however, he experiments with new production to boost his profile. The Underdogs produced "4 Minutes," where Avant's buttery tenor races a ticking clock to earn a lady's trust. Jermaine Dupri is responsible for the first single, "You Know What," a bouncy track featuring Lil Wayne, on which Avant uses chopped *oohs* and *aahs* to successfully translate his bedroom antics to the dance floor. While *Director* doesn't completely change Avant's undefined status, his efforts to define a unique sound have yielded some standout moments. *Clover Hope*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
BIG BOI PRESENTS...GOT PURP VOL. 2 ALL-STARS
VIRGIN

Big Boi's well-bred purple-ribbon canines may set a consistent standard, but the same can't be said for his new rap collective. While Blackowned C-Bone, Rock D the Legend, and Killer Mike ignite the addictive posse cut "Kryptonite," Goodie Mob meanders through "Hold On," spitting about surviving hard times minus any vintage Goodie imagery. Similarly, singer Scar drifts in and out of mediocrity on the airy "What Is This," which contrasts starkly with Sleepy Brown's ivory-tickling on "Me, My Baby & My Cadillac." There's some growth potential here, but these dogs could still use some grooming. *Chris Yuscavage*

DWELE
SOME KINDA...
VIRGIN

At face value, Dwele's confident falsetto and inclination toward jazz will cause some to write him off as another D'Angelo clone. But his sophomore effort, *Some Kinda...*, is a display of the Detroit crooner's distinct Motown soul. "Wake the Baby" features a seductive melody courtesy of saxophonist Boney James, and "I Think I Love U" is a slick stepper groove. Pseudo B-boying ("Keep On," featuring Slum Village and Common) and tame dance numbers ("Know Your Name") can spoil Dwele's dim-lit ambience. Yet his warm tones and heartfelt verses usually restore the romance, proving that he's capable of continuing in his hometown tradition. *Jozen Cummings*

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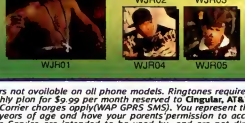

Voicetones

Call On Line 1, Playboy!	RJR06
Yo We Dot It Like We Do It, IT'S MURDER	RJR07
Yo I'm Trying To Do The Damn Thing Tonight At The Club	RJR08
You A Pimp, Pick Up The Phone	RJR09
Yo What Up Babygirl...	RJR10
(YAYa?) What's Going On Babygirl...	RJR11

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INDIE BEAT
Underdogs sound off

> MUGGS VS GZA THE GENIUS, *GRANDMASTERS* (Angeles) Wu-Tang Clan's complex MC drops sharp, lucid stories of street kingpins à la *Liquid Swords* over the Cypress Hill vet's cryptic samples and glassy-eyed grooves.

> ASAMOV, *AND NOW...* (6 Hole) Summoning the pass-the-mic group ethic of rap music's past, this Jacksonville-based quartet achieves a feel-good vibe on its debut via soulful beats, vocal harmonies, and doses of humor.

> STEVE SPACEK, *SPACE SHIFT* (*soundincolor.com*) The front man of the U.K.-based, electro-neo-soul outfit Spacek hits an even funkier stride on his solo debut, which bounces with fractured drums and futuristic effects and soothes with cool vocals.

> CUNNINLYNGUISTS, *A PIECE OF STRANGE* (QNS) Southern duo Deacon and Kno recruits Cee-Lo and Immortal Technique, adding bite to their emotive tracks about God, politics, and the daily struggle.

LAB NOTES
Who's doing what with whom in the studio?

Tis the season to be...broke and overweight. But you might wanna stash a few bills for some of these upcoming musical treats. So put down that turkey leg and pay attention, because that other guy from Houston, **Lil' Flip,** is wrapping up his third joint, *I Need Mine*, for his big return to relevancy. By *Mine*, he's referring to love, of course, since all the hoopla these days is about H-town next-ups **Mike Jones, Slim Thug,** and **Paul Wall.** Maybe with **Scott Storch** and **Salaam Remi** supplying beats, the Leprechaun will remain lucky in love. Meanwhile, the jolly hip hop duo of **Jazze Pha** and **Cee-Lo** will be collaborating for *The Happy Hour*. **Mannie Fresh** will be lending a hand on the production tip here, while cameos range from **Nate Dogg** and **Keith Sweat** to the **Pussycat Dolls.** We will be RSVPing, yes? And just in time to get you drunk off their intoxicating sounds, **the Neptunes** will be pushing the **Clipse** back to the fore, contributing 100 percent of the tracks for their sophomore LP. Now that sounds great. Can't you just taste it?

CHECK THE RÉSUMÉ

Producers tell how they work the hits.

PLAYTIME: Brothers Salih (left) and Tomar making it hot.

STATE CHAMPS

Carnival Beats define the Texas sound.

They were like a mid-'80s version of the Partridge Family. Almost. Long before Tomar, 37, and Salih Williams, 32, made career-defining beats for Houston MCs, the Austin natives traversed the state in a six-member family band, covering songs like the Commodores' "Brick House." "Our dad got us drums and guitars and hid them from our mom in the washing machine," Tomar recalls. "Before we knew it, we were singing anywhere that would pay us." Years later, through H-town legend Big Moe, Tomar and Salih became regular beatmakers for local label Wreckshop Records. The two called their burgeoning production endeavor Carnival Beats and began bonding with another Lone Star label, SwishaHouse Records. Via the Williams brothers' sleepy bass lines and radio-friendly hooks, Mike Jones, Paul Wall, and Slim Thug went from provincial artists to household names.

> BIG MOE—"STILL DA BARRE BABY"

Tomar: We wanted to take the seriousness out of the game. Big Moe likes to drink, and we were like, Let's laugh about it. Wreckshop Records told us, "You make him sound weak," but the DJs loved it. That track was getting, like, 6,000 spins a week.

Salih: If you listen to Big Moe, he's got a jolly-type sound, but he's also street. Barre (aka syrup) was really popular back then. And Big Moe was rappin' about it.

> MIKE JONES—"STILL TIPPIN'," FEATURING SLIM THUG AND PAUL WALL

S: That was originally a throwaway beat. But Mike Jones told me it was cool. It derived from me playing strings on the keyboard. This hit the streets in Houston back in 2002, but SwishaHouse kept promoting it and brought it back to life, and it blew up all over again.

> BUN B—"DRAPED UP"

S: When we made that beat for Bun-B, I sampled Lil' Keke's "Pimp the Pen." My feeling was that if I'm going to sample anyone, it might as well be someone from my backyard. Once we made the beat, Bun B was ready with his lyrics.

> PAUL WALL—"SITTIN' SIDEWAYZ"

S: I sampled myself playing the piano, mainly because I didn't have a lot of equipment at the time. The song worked well for Paul. People down here like him.

T: It wasn't a commercial beat. It was grungy. Cats in Texas don't move that much on the dance floor, so we made it for them. We actually used some Mike Jones vocals over the song first, and then we got some from Paul.

Dan Frosch

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SCOTT STORCH
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THE VIBE SPOT

For more pictures from Artist on the Verge and other VIBE events, visit our gallery on the newly relaunched VIBE Online at www.vibe.com.

ARTIST ON THE VERGE: The Universal Motown Records Showcase Universal Motown Records, Verizon Wireline, and VIBE hosted the end-of-summer installment of Artist on the Verge at Eugene in New York City. Artist on the Verge was hosted by HOT 97's Angie Martinez and featured live performances by Chamillionaire (**1**), Yummy (**2**), and David Banner. Beats provided by DJ Enuff, with courtesy cocktails provided by Courvoisier. **3** Angie Martinez with the Coca-Cola Classic Host winner, Jacqueline Grouin. **4** Nick Cannon, Sylvia Rhone, president, Motown and executive vice president, Universal; Yummy, and Kenard Gibbs, president, VIBE. **5** David Banner with Karla Rudford, executive director of events & artist relations. **6** David Banner completes Jacqueline's winning night with a photo.

THANK YOU: Gus Hennigburg (Bodie Entertainment); Nasta Johns and staff at Brooks Catering; Neal and staff at Eugene; Shamil Dias, Talke Fox, Kirk Harding, Aviva Klein, Alison Stanley, Elise Wright and the Universal Motown staff; Jessica Peltz and the Courvoisier team (Zenith Media); John Preston and Mitch Wagner (R/GA) and the Verizon team at Zenith Media.

PHOTO CREDITS: Terence Jennings (1,2, 5, 6), Ray Tamarra (3,4)

VIBE
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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 187) his role as a drug dealer named Birdie in the movie. "They would beat up dudes together, they would do the bullshit that I wasn't doing," says Henchmen.

Tupac and Agnant were inseparable, Henchmen says, club hopping together nearly every night. One night in mid-November 1993, Agnant took 'Pac to Nell's nightclub, where he was introduced to a 19-year-old fan. A few days later, the young woman met Tupac at the Le Parker Meridien Hotel in midtown Manhattan, where, she later testified, she was gang-raped by a posse that included Tupac and Agnant. The rapper maintained that he felt he was drugged and framed in that hotel room. Nonetheless, Tupac was convicted of three counts of first-degree sexual abuse, a felony. Curiously, prosecutors allowed Agnant, who was represented by an attorney affiliated with a police union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, to plead guilty to misdemeanor charges. Tension grew between Tupac and Agnant after he made disparaging comments about Agnant in New York's *Daily News*.

On November 30, 1994, as Shakur awaited the verdict on the rape charge, Henchmen invited him to record a few rhymes for an MC named Little Shawn. Tupac agreed—for $7,000 to $8,000. "I'll get that for you," Henchmen remembers telling Tupac. "I'm gonna call Andre Harrell [then CEO of Uptown Entertainment], and I'm gonna have him issue you a check. He said, 'Nah man, I want cash.' And I said, 'Pac, what the fuck I look like giving you cash? Come down and get it done, and what I'll do is have a check waiting. He got real belligerent. He started saying, 'Man, if you want me to do it, you better have my money there. I want cash. Don't have me come there if you ain't got my money.' I kinda laughed. 'Pac, what the fuck are you talking about? This ain't no drug deal, nigga! I said, All right, you'll have your money, just be there. He hung up. So I called Andre Harrell and I said, 'Dre, you gotta be at the studio because you gotta let this nigga know he's gonna get his money so he don't get stupid."

Henchmen and Harrell agreed to meet at the Quad Recording Studios at 723 Seventh Avenue at around eight that evening. Puffy and Biggie also happened to be recording there that night, and Puffy hung out with Henchmen and Harrell as they waited for Tupac. Henchmen says that two hours later, Shakur was still nowhere to be found, and Henchmen, who was footing the bill for expensive studio time, started to become angry and impatient.

Suddenly, Henchmen recalls, "The elevator door opens up, and 'Pac comes off the elevator and his head is bleeding. 'Pac looks at me and says, 'Why you let them know I'm comin', man? Why you told them niggas I was coming here? You was the only nigga who knew I was coming man!' I said, 'Pac, hold on, come talk to me. You my nigga. Tell me what the fuck happened to you. He wouldn't come to me. He kept screaming out, 'Man, why! Why did you let them niggas know?' He looked at the engineer and he said, 'Yo, man, call the police, man. These niggas shot me, man.'" In an April 1995 VIBE interview, Shakur scornfully remembered the night he was shot and robbed of his jewelry and money. "Andre Harrell was there, Puffy was there, Biggie... there was about 40 niggas there," he said. "All of them had jewels on, more jewels than me." Tupac also described the assailants as wearing army fatigues, which led him to believe they were from Brooklyn and down with B.I.G.

With Tupac wounded and the NYPD on the way, Henchmen's street instincts kicked in. "When I hear the police, I'm at the elevator," Henchmen says. "I'm at the elevator door, and this little dude from Oakland named Shorty pulls out a gun and says, 'If 'Pac die, nigga, one of you niggas dying!' I said, Oh, you're pulling out a gun? Let's go downstairs and talk about it. My gun is in my car. I'm trying to get to my gun, because I don't know what the fuck is about to transpire." Shorty wasn't the only one who held him responsible for the attack. Word soon spread on the street that Henchmen and his associates were involved in the shooting.

Tupac was wheeled out on an ambulance gurney and photographed by swarming paparazzi with his middle finger raised in the air. The next morning, he appeared in court for the rape trial wrapped in bandages and in a wheelchair; his display of war wounds likely elicited some sympathy from the jury, but he was convicted nonetheless. Embittered by the shooting and his conviction, Tupac continued his jihad against the East Coast hip hop scene from behind bars—and put Henchmen in his crosshairs, telling friends, Interscope execs, and fellow prisoners at upstate New York's Clinton Correctional Facility that Henchmen was involved with the ambush.

"I called him and said, Yo, stop putting my name in the bullshit," Henchmen says. "You're getting me upset, man. Stop putting me in your little mix. All he was trying to do was sensationalize his bullshit." Henchmen has always denied any involvement in the Quad shooting. He also questions Shakur's account of the assault, suggesting that the rapper's gunshot wounds may have been self-inflicted. "Tupac went for his gun and shot himself, and it all makes sense to me because if you get shot five times, you layin' down. You wouldn't do all that running around like he was doing up in that studio," says Henchmen. "Later on I heard that the gun went off, and he got the shit beat out of him, and he was gun-butted." Also, in a letter published in the August 1995 issue of VIBE, Stretch, who entered the Quad's lobby with Tupac, wrote, "Me, personally, I only heard one shot. I didn't hear four, five, six shots. And he was saying that he got shot three, four times. None of us remember hearing four, five shots." Dr. Leon Pachter, head of the Bellevue Hospital trauma department that treated Shakur, confirms that the rapper did have five gunshot wounds "in various places—arm, mostly in scrotum," but declined to elaborate further. Tupac stuck with his story. At the end of 1995, at the behest of Puffy, Henchmen arranged for a sit-down in Los Angeles between himself, Tupac, Suge Knight, and as mediator, the widely respected Houston-based hip hop impresario J. Prince. "Puffy didn't want no problems, he was like, 'Man, go over there and figure this shit out,'" Henchmen says. "I had to get J., who was neutral, so 'Pac didn't feel like an East Coast dude was closing the deal." During the meeting, Henchmen conveyed an offer from Puffy to record a collaboration with Tupac. To sweeten the deal, Puffy agreed to let Knight's Death Row label release what was sure to be a multimillion seller. But, according to Henchmen, Tupac stormed into the room and pointed at Henchmen proclaiming, "Them niggas shot me." Henchmen pleaded with Tupac to cut it out. "I was like, Dude, you need to stop saying that." Predictably, Knight sided with Tupac, telling Henchmen, "I gotta ride with my homie."

A few weeks later, Henchmen confronted Tupac backstage at a

D'Angelo and Groove Theory show at the House of Blues in L.A. "The whole Death Row clique was there, and I remember going to him–I had some Crip dudes with me–and said, Dude, you gotta stop telling people that shit," Henchmen recalls. "For real, nigga, I don't give a fuck, it could go down right now. Why you blaming Puffy and Biggie? Them niggas ain't got nothing to do with this.... Nobody came to rob you, they came to discipline you. That's what happened." With members of the Crips backing him up, Henchmen put such a scare into Tupac that he didn't even ask Knight, who was standing nearby, for help. "I remember Suge calling over and saying, "Pac, everything all right?" Henchmen says. "'Pac knew better than to tell him that something was wrong because I was so angry."

Tupac would be murdered in Las Vegas several months later, after cameras caught him and a posse that included Knight beating up reputed Crips member Orlando Anderson at the MGM Grand hotel. Henchmen's admission that he confronted Shakur with Crips in tow is astonishing, as members of that gang are widely believed to be behind his murder. But he says the Crips who accompanied him to the House of Blues were "Rolling 60s" Crips, not Southside Crips, the set Anderson was affiliated with. Henchmen says he believes that Tupac brought on his own murder by beating up Anderson. "If you're not a gangbanger, you don't stomp gangbangers out," he says. "I'm from the streets, I don't do that. I get another gangbanger to do that, you know what I'm saying?"

In early January 1996, just weeks after his confrontation with Tupac, federal agents collared Henchmen in Los Angeles. He was indicted for running a crack cocaine operation that stretched from New York to North Carolina. But thanks to representation from high-profile Miami lawyer Roy Black and a case that rested on the shaky credibility of a gaggle of unreliable government informants, Henchmen beat all of the most serious charges against him and was sentenced to only five years in prison on firearm charges, which he served.

As Henchmen was doing his time in a North Carolina federal prison, in the fall of 1996, Death Row Records released 'Pac's last album (as Makaveli), *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory,* shortly after his death. The album closed with a tirade against Henchmen and Agnant called "Against All Odds":

A real live tale about a snitch named Haitian Jack
Knew he was working for the feds, same crime, different trial
Nigga picture what he said, and did I mention
Promised to pay back Jimmy Henchmen in due time
I knew you bitch niggaz was listening, the world is mine
Set me up, wet me up, niggaz stuck me up
Heard the guns bust, but you tricks never shut me up

Tupac portrayed Henchmen as an omnipotent gangster directing subordinates like Agnant to murder him, an image that carried even more weight because the song was one of the last the iconic rapper ever recorded. Henchmen became an übervillain, not just to Tupac's fans, but also to the hip hop world at large–and he says that West Coast players like Suge Knight have held a grudge against him ever since. But Henchmen says that Tupac's beef with Biggie and Puffy was mere hip hop theater. "It's almost like what 50 does now–he makes a situation to sell records, to become that dude who is that force," he says. "God bless him."

When Henchmen came home from prison in the spring of 1999, he had lost his momentum from the early '90s and was relegated to working far behind the scenes in the music business. Thanks to friends like Barry Hankerson, who managed Aaliyah, Henchmen was soon able to land a few good gigs, such as helping produce the soundtrack for *Romeo Must Die* in 2000. Henchmen was essentially waiting for his big score, which came in 2003 when the Game signed to Dr. Dre's Aftermath label. Henchmen had met the Game through a producer friend in Los Angeles, and the pair immediately hit it off, with Game soon asking Henchmen to manage him. At first, Henchmen was hesitant. "I decided I would just advise him," he says, "because the climate that 'Pac had left for me at Interscope was so bad."

But after Henchmen began getting the Game's tracks exposure on mixtapes from influential New York DJs like Kay Slay, Game implored Henchmen to become his official manager. When the rapper went to Interscope and told Dre and Chairman Jimmy Iovine about his management plans, "they fucking flipped," Henchmen says. "They didn't think I could do anything for him. But Game seen what I did to get the buzz. That's why I got love for the kid, because he took a chance with them shelving the project." In the end, persistence paid off. Henchmen worked especially hard to overcome the label execs' negative perceptions of him, scoring Game a Boost Mobile commercial and a huge Sean John billboard that stood on one of the busiest stretches of Sunset Boulevard. "They said Jimmy was a bad guy, that my career wouldn't go to the next level, but we fucked 'em in the ass," Game says today with a certain glee. "It's only been about 10 months since *The Documentary* came out, and not only am I the number one rapper in the world–we swallowed G Unit whole."

The disunity within G Unit began to be felt in the fall of 2004; as anticipation was growing around the Game's debut, Henchmen began to pull the artist from his commitments to the collective. "I wouldn't do nothing with them," Henchmen says. "'We need him to go to Cancún.' No. 'We need him to do a photo shoot.' Why? He wasn't doing the things they expected a G Unit member to do. That strained things."

Relations between 50 Cent and Henchmen worsened as Henchmen completed production on a documentary called *The Infamous Times: The Original 50 Cent.* 50 was interviewed about his gangster namesake, and the DVD release was scheduled to coincide with the March 1 in-store date of 50's album, *The Massacre.* For one of the climactic shots of the movie, Henchmen wanted to film 50 purchasing a monument for Martin's gravesite. "I told him the family wants us to buy the tombstone, and I want to tape you putting in the order," Henchmen recalls saying. "That will make you big in the streets." But it didn't work out that way. "He made me chase him for two months for $7,500, so I just went ahead and bought it," Henchmen says. "How do you take this dude's name? The kid died tombless. And you won't even invest $7,500 in him? That made me really look at him different."

50 Cent's attorney, Miles Cooley, calls Henchmen's allegations

"specious," saying that 50 had only agreed to appear in the DVD on the condition that any proceeds he might earn would be contributed to the Martin family or to 50's charitable G Unity Foundation. Because Henchmen would not agree to those terms, the lawyer says, 50 ultimately declined to authorize the use of his interview in the DVD. "50 Cent is informed that not a dime of the proceeds has been donated to Mr. Martin's family or to charity," says Cooley, adding that his client intended to sue those involved in the distribution and sale of the DVD "to enjoin the unlawful use of the interview and infringement of the 50 Cent trademark."

Henchmen responds that he never promised to donate money to G Unity and that Martin's family will receive proceeds from the DVD as soon as they set up a trust; Martin's family has released a statement supporting Henchmen's account.

But 50's attorney still filed a motion on July 9 for a preliminary injunction against further distribution of *The Original 50 Cent* DVD; a judge later denied the attorney's motion. "We are gratified that the court found that there was nothing improper in the DVD's title or the way in which we are marketing it," Henchmen said in a statement, adding that 50's legal claim was without merit and should never have been raised. "We believe it was filed more as an attempt to further his childish campaign of jealousy against the Game and his management than to vindicate any legitimate legal rights."

The 50-Game alliance shattered completely in late January, when Game's *The Documentary* notched first-week sales of nearly 600,000, far higher than debut albums from Lloyd Banks and Young Buck. "When Banks did 400,000 and went off the charts and Game did 600,000 and then a million in two months, that fucked with 50," Henchmen says. And the worst was yet to come.

50 Cent went after Game in a cover-story interview for VIBE's April '05 issue, giving the public its first glimpse of the simmering beef. "He's real opinionated," 50 said about why he and Game got into a pushing match. "He hasn't been around long enough to know that he needs to listen." Game addressed it on New York's Hot 97 radio, when Funkmaster Flex brought up the story. On February 28, 50 declared on New York's Power 105.1 that Game was no longer part of G Unit. The announcement shocked hip hop fans, but Henchmen says he wasn't suprised. "It was something that I knew was coming," he says, "I just didn't think it would be that extreme."

Later that same night, as 50 gave an interview on Hot 97 deriding the Game's work on *The Documentary*, police say members of Game's entourage rushed the station's downtown Manhattan studios to confront 50 but were met by his security detail in the hallway. During the melee, one member of Game's crew—24-year-old Kevin Reed of Compton, Calif.—was shot. Cops arriving at the scene found Reed bloodied and kneeling by the curb and picked up four spent shell casings. Reed was treated at nearby St. Vincent's Hospital and released. No arrests have been made in the shooting. Henchmen won't comment on the incident, noting that he wasn't in the studio—or even with Game—when it occurred. "I was on a plane on my way to Los Angeles," Henchmen says. "Thank God, thank *God*." The high-profile truce between 50 and Game choreographed at Harlem's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture on March 9, the anniversary of the Notorious B.I.G.'s murder—and the subsequent sales boost to both *The Documentary* and *The Massacre*—had all the appearances of a publicity stunt, especially since the beef escalated days after the press conference. It's a suspicion that infuriates Henchmen, whose feelings are still raw because of the years he endured being a hip hop pariah after the Quad incident. "Shooting back and forth ain't good for nothing," he says. "It ain't good for hip hop. It ain't good for the music business." Still, Henchmen relishes his role as an inspiration for rappers. In the early 1990s, he remembers, Biggie and Tupac—whom he says looked to him as a big brother—would sit rapt as Henchmen told tales from his days on Brooklyn's streets. "My lifestyle," he boasts, "is the thing Biggie rapped about."

It's the day after the Game's concert at the Bayfront, and Henchmen distractedly picks at his shrimp cocktail at a table outside the Pelican hotel on Ocean Drive. The Game, resplendent in crimson gang colors, is nearby taking pictures with fans and dealing with a somewhat out-of-control teenage white girl, who keeps yelling, "Compton in da house!"

Henchmen seems distraught that the specter of Quad is being raised yet again by the possibility of a new federal probe. "There's more to me than this," he says. He worries that his former associates, Agnant and "King Tut" Johnson, may yet implicate him in the Quad shooting. "It saddens me to know that Tut and all of those guys are gonna trade in somebody else for their freedom," Henchmen says. He stops to correct himself. "I hope that's not what he's doing. I love Tut; he grew up with me. But guys like that only remember me one way."

For his part, Johnson says he's no snitch, but he was wronged. "Jimmy Henchmen knows that I won't destroy other people's lives or trade in somebody else for my freedom," Johnson writes from Lee County Penitentiary in Virginia, where he is imprisoned on robbery charges, adding that he was "framed by some very crafty individuals who used their resources to manipulate the government and taxpayers into believing that I was responsible for the attempt [sic] assassination of Tupac Shakur at Quad Studios in New York and that I was the solution to Tupac Shakur's vicious murder in Las Vegas." Attempts to reach Agnant were unsuccessful.

After all that's gone down, Henchmen presents an unusual blend of contrition and pride. "I acknowledge the amount of bullshit that I been through," he says. "I don't know how to explain the ignorance that I was involved in, but for me to break away from that to get to the point where I'm able to have rational conversations with Jimmy Iovine and Tommy Mottola is a feat that I thought I would never be able to make. That's the story I would like to tell." It's getting across, judging by the surprise success of *The Original 50 Cent* (more than 150,000 copies have been sold, according to one of its cocreators, Griff) and the number of fans who recognize him from the DVD. As he lunches at the Pelican, he's mobbed by well-wishers bearing business cards, mixtapes, even their own DVDs. Henchmen says *The Original 50 Cent* is the first in a series of street documentaries. He is considering one about himself because he wants his story told the right way.

"I was a little upset with the Malcolm X movie, that they stayed so long on the negative shit he did," Henchmen says. "So please, if you can't write something positive, don't write anything. I get enough shit on the Internet. Please tell the motherfuckers that at the end, this"—he gestures at Game and the budding impresarios lining up to shake his hand—"is where my head is at."

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21208 The Game - Hate It Or Love It
21188 Clara - Oh
21205 Nelly - N Day Say
21211 Ying Yang Twins - Wait
21207 Snoop Doggy Dogg - Signs
21202 Missy Elliot - Lose Control
21209 Tony Yayo - So Seductive
21197 Busta Rhymes - I'll Hurt You
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21213 Cypress Hill - Insane In The Brain
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21225 Usher - Yeah
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21212 Al Green - Let's Stay Together
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21218 Lloyd Banks - Karma
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21229 Jenna - Mmm... I Love it ...
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21231 Jenna - Who's More Important?
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21233 Keisha - Get The Phone, Baby
21234 Keisha - Pick up the damn phone!
21232 Keisha - Drama On The Line
21226 Don Juan - It's Your Loverman, Baby!
21227 Don Juan - Pimpilicious
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COVER STORY: "UNBREAKABLE"

COVER: Top, price upon request, by **Roberto Cavalli,** N.Y.C. (212-755-7722); jeans, $300, by **Live Life Denim,** at Atrium, N.Y.C. (212-473-3980); earrings, $40, by **By Boe,** at Annika Inez, N.Y.C. (212-717-9644).

PAGE 26: Top, $79, by **Baby Phat** *(babyphat.com)*; necklace, $275, by **Robindira Unsworth,** at **Fragments** *(fragments.com)*.

PAGE 152: Tank, $41, by **James Perse,** Los Angeles (310-276-7277).

PAGE 154: Jacket, $5,000, by **Ralph Lauren Collection,** N.Y.C. (212-606-2100); jeans, $145, by **Citizens of Humanity,** at Barneys New York *(barneys.com)*; earrings, $95, by **R.J. Graziano,** N.Y.C. (212-685-1248); pendant, $1,500, by **KC Designs,** at **Fragments** *(fragments.com)*.

PAGE 156: Top, $656, by **Linda Loudermilk,** Los Angeles *(lindaloudermilk.com)*; bracelet, $79, by **Marie-Lise Lachapelle** *(marielise.net)*.

GEAR: "BOOTY CALL"

PAGE 110: Austin boots, $132, by **Harley-Davidson Footwear** (888-637-7001); sweater boots, $100, by **Timberland** *(timberland.com)*; Stephanie boots, $860, by **Franklin Elman,** at Neiman Marcus *(neimanmarcus.com)*; Ella boots, $230, by the **Frye Company** *(fryeboots.com)*; ida boots, $895, by **YSL,** N.Y.C. (212-988-3821); Candy boots, $130, by **EMU Australia** (866-EMU-SHOE); Nico boots, $260, by **Fornarina** *(fornarina.com)*; motorcycle boots, $645, by **D&G** (212-965-8000); Bubble boots, $195, by **United Nude** *(unitednude.com)*; Gatling boots, $150, by **Oakley** *(oakley.com)*.

GIFT GUIDE: "CATER TO YOU"

PAGE 197: Panther pendant, price on request, by **Cartier** (800-CARTIER); fur throw, $1,475, by **Adrienne Landau,** at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. (212-826-8900).

PAGE 198: Diamond pendant, $1,495, by **Movado** (888-4-MOVADO); nougat hoops, $3,700, by **Dior Fine Jewelry** (800-929-DIOR); turntable pendant, $60, by **Swatch Bijoux** *(swatch.com)*; charm bracelet, $2,100, and large ring, $3,300, both by **Diane von Furstenberg** by **H.Stern,** at H.Stern, N.Y.C. (212-688-0300); diamond earrings and dog tag, all by **Baby Phat Fine Jewelry;** heart tag necklace, $1,925, tag pendant, $160, and ID bracelet, $275, all by **Tiffany & Co.** (800-526-0649); silver bracelet, $150, silver bracelet, $225, both by **Emporio Armani** *(emporioarmani.com)*; teddy bear necklace, $1,450, cheetah ring, $3,700, and diamond knuckle ring, $10,500, all by **Baby Doll Gems** *(babydollgems.com)*; star earrings, $3,100, by **H. Stern;** rubber link ring, $550, and link bracelet, $595, both by **Simmons Jewelry Co. Items Collection** *(simmons jewelryco.com)*; cuff links, $350, and dog tag with leather necklace, $725, all by **Cartier** *(cartier.com)*; *mr.* hook chain, $1,295, diamond cuff links, $16,900, silver zigzag, $139, and rose gold zigzag ring, $695, all by **Marisa Perry,** N.Y.C. (212-566-8977); identity cuff links, $690, and ring, $820, all by **H.Stern;** cuff links, $85, by **J. Lindeberg,** N.Y.C. (212-625-9403); silver bracelet, $225, by **Emporio Armani,** at Bloomingdale's.

PAGE 199: Tortoiseshell watch, $120, by **Michael Kors,** at select Macy's *(macys.com)*; show girl watch, $150, by **Baby Phat Fashion Watches;** cocktail watch, $5,500, by **Tiffany & Co.** (800-526-0649); *charm* watch, $750, by **Gucci** (888-225-2292); champagne watch, $95, by **DKNY** *(dkny.com)*; Christal watch, $4,250, by **Dior** by **John Galliano** (800-929-DIOR); *mirror* watch, $22,500, by **Movado** (888-4-MOVADO); **Dumont** watch, $10,000, by **Cartier** *(cartier.com)*; rubber and diamond watch, $3,090, by **Concord** *(concord-watch.com)*; chrono watch, $1,795, by **Gucci**; chronograph watch, $170, by **Michael Kors,** at select Nordstrom stores *(nordstrom.com)*; signature etching watch, $425, by **Burberry** (800-699-0564); rattle snake watch, $110, by **Swatch** *(swatch.com)*; spinner watch, $2,818, by **G Unit** *(g-unitwatches.com)*.

PAGES 200–201: Champagne, $32, by **Piper-Heidsieck** *(piper-heidsieck.com)*; cooler, $88, and coasters, $55 each, all available at **W Hotels** *(whotelsthestore.com)*; sampler pack of 4 scotch whiskies, $100, all by **Johnnie Walker** *(johnniewalker.com)*; HQ liqueur, $25, by **Hpnotiq** *(hpnotiq.com)*; vodka, $30, and martini glass, both by **Ciroc** *(ciroc.com)*; tumbler, $6, and decanter, $33, both by **Crate & Barrel** *(crateandbarrel.com)*; liqueur, $20, by **RémyRed** *(remy.com)*; gin, $35, by **Tanqueray N° Ten** *(tanqueray.com)*; tequila, $25, by **Jose Cuervo Especial** *(josecuervo.com)*; vodka, $30, by **Belvedere** *(belvederevodka.com)*; whiskey, $47, by **Crown Royal Special Reserve** *(crownroyal.com)*; tray, $145, and base, $134, both by **Armani Casa** *(armanicasa.com)*.

PAGE 202: Mink coat, $5,500, by **House of Dereon** (800-347-7040); Oasha coyote boots, $1,500, by **Ralph Lauren,** N.Y.C. (212-606-2100); fur scarf, $550, by **Pologeorgis,** at Neiman Marcus *(neimanmarcus.com)*; faux fur, $348, by **Banana Republic** (888-BRSTYLE); fur clutch, $98, by **AIX Armani Exchange** *(armaniexchange.com)*; fur trapper hat, $595, by **Denimaxx** *(denimaxx.com)*.

PAGE 203: Shearling, $4,000, by **YSL** *(ysl.com)*; fur scarf, $540, by **D&G** (212-965-8000); sweater, $4,500, by **Bottega Veneta** *(bottegaveneta.com)*; scarf, $375, by **Boss Black** (800-HUGO-BOS5); fur coat, $7,800, by **Giorgio Armani** *(emporioarmani.com)*; fur trapper hat, $1,000, by **Pologeorgis,** at Pologeorgis, N.Y.C. (212-563-2250).

PAGES 204–205: Bookcase, $3,400, and checkered frame, $47, both by **Armani Casa** *(armanicasa.com)*; teal vase, $15, turquoise vase, $20, and amethyst vase, $10, all by **Crate & Barrel** *(crateandbarrel.com)*; fruit holder, $200, available at **W Hotels** *(whotels thestore)*; red frame, $145, and green frame, $145, both by **Burberry,** N.Y.C. (212-407-7100); blanket, $198, by **Banana Republic** (888-BRSTYLE); paper trays, $4,145 each, by **Rudi Rabitti,** at Bloomingdale's (800-232-1854); tealight holders, $290 each, by **Bottega Veneta** *(bottegaveneta.com)*; vase, $90, by **Movado** (888-4-MOVADO); ice bucket, $125, by **Tiffany & Co.** (800-526-0649).

PAGES 206–207: Jeans, $58, by **Levi's** *(levis.com)*; belt, special order, by **Marisa Perry,** N.Y.C. (212-566-8977); blazer, $149, by **Calvin Klein Jeans,** at Macy's *(macys.com)*; hat, $13, by **Old Navy** (800-OLD-NAVY); pillow, $30, by **MTV Cribs** for **JCPenney** *(jcpenney.com)*; bag, $2,570, by **Louis Vuitton** (866-VUITTON); sweater, $655, by **D&G** (212-965-8000); sneakers, $150, by **Jordan** *(jumpman23.com)*; gloves, $98, by **Banana Republic** *(bananarepublic.com)*. Jacket, $178, by **DKNY Jeans Juniors** (800-777-4524); fur throw, $1,900, by **Adrienne Landau,** at Neiman Marcus; clutch, $995, by **YSL** *(ysl.com)*; handbag, $2,110, and wedge shoes, $650, all by **Dior** by **John Galliano** (800-929-DIOR); belt, $139, by **Miss Sixty** (212-575-0315); gloves, $68, by **Banana Republic** *(bananarepublic.com)*; pillow, $30, by **MTV Cribs** for **JCPenney;** skirt, $58, by **Request,** at Macy's *(macys.com)*.

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a. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	1,232,475	1,186,386
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
1. Paid/Requested Outside County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	779,546	732,308
2. Paid In-County Subscriptions	N/A	N/A
3. Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution	190,735	175,000
4. Other Classes mailed Through the USPS	N/A	154,362
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circ	933,908	923,407
d. Free Distribution by Mail		
Outside-County as stated on form 3541	6,036	N/A
In-County as stated on form 3541	N/A	5,933
Other classes mailed through the USPS	N/A	N/A
e. Free Distribution Outside the Mail	9,854	9,932
f. Total Free Distribution	15,890	15,865
g. Total Distribution	949,798	939,272
h. Copies Not Distributed	282,677	247,114
i. Total	1,232,475	1,186,386
j. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circ	98.3%	98.3%

16. This Statement of Ownership will be printed in the December 2005 issue

17. Leonard E. Burnett Jr., Publisher 9/01/05

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2. We loved **Common's** performance at VH1's *Hip Hop Honors*, but shouldn't **Jay-Z** have rocked **Big Daddy Kane's** "Raw"?
3. Does it bother anyone else that **Marques Houston** bit **D'Angelo's** "Untitled (How Does It Feel?)" video for his "Naked" video?
4. Is **Tony Yayo** the new **Flavor Flav?**
5. Isn't the slang that **Diddy** taught **Martha Stewart** when he appeared on her show a little outdated?
6. With his hilarious new show, how could anybody hate **Chris Rock?**
7. Will rappers ever stop needing to travel with **bodyguards?**
8. Who wants a **Fugees** reunion more than **Pras?**
9. Didn't anyone tell **Lil' Kim, Beanie Sigel,** and **Black Rob** that it's kind of hard to promote an album from jail?
10. Was **Super Head** for real when she told **Tyra Banks** that people refer to her as the "Hollywood Hop"?
11. Now that 50 has signed them, will **M.O.P.** finally get its long-overdue platinum plaque?
12. Isn't **Ne-Yo** the most exciting male R&B singer/songwriter to debut in a long time?
13. Is **Bow Wow** prettier than **Ciara?**
14. Who shot **Suge Knight?**
15. Who told **Cowboy Troy** to pick up the mic?
16. And can someone please tell **Tyrese** to stop trying to rap?
17. When did **Syleena Johnson** get so hot?
18. Doesn't it worry you that kids everywhere will be playing **50 Cent's** ultra-violent new video game, ***50 Cent: Bulletproof?***
19. Do you think the lack of interest in recent albums from D12's **Proof** and **Bizarre** will finally convince them to just be happy living off **Eminem?**
20. Why is everything always about **money?**

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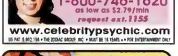

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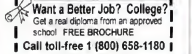

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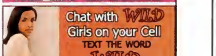

Call 212-448-7470 for more information on advertising in the Vibe Classifieds.

EAZY-E

One of the founding fathers of gangsta rap, he was everyone's favorite villain.

"*Who walked through the White House without a business suit? Compton hat, Jheri curl dripp'in' on Ronald Reagan's shoes.*"—"Dreams," the Game

Eazy-E probably weighed 120 pounds soaking wet, but with his "I don't give a fuck" boldness, trademark L.A. Raiders cap, greasy Jheri curl, and dark sunglasses, the Compton native changed pop music forever. When he released Niggaz With Attitude's seminal *Straight Outta Compton* through his own drug money–funded Ruthless Records, the music pissed off everybody from the black middle class to the white establishment. It gave a voice, though, to a desperate generation coming to grips with the violence and despair left in the wake of crack in the mid-'80s.

From early on, Eazy (born Eric Wright) was a complex figure. The man who never registered to vote met with President George H.W. Bush at a $2,500-a-plate Republican Senators Inner Circle luncheon in 1991 (though it wasn't in the White House, and Reagan wasn't there). The man famous for the controversial "Fuck tha Police" publicly supported Theodore Briseno, the only nonwhite officer accused of beating Rodney King. The N.W.A member with the most street pedigree also had the most business acumen.

Unfortunately, his boardroom tactics ultimately led to the breakup of N.W.A amid accusations of shady business maneuvers and vitriolic beefs with former group members and friends Ice Cube and Dr. Dre. Ironically, because Dre had to get released from his contract with Ruthless to start Death Row Records, Eazy still got paid off his subsequent releases. He further proved his business savvy by later discovering Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, who eventually sold more than 15 million records.

Sadly, after being hospitalized on February 24, 1995, for what he thought was chronic asthma, the 31-year-old Eazy suddenly died from AIDS complications on March 26, 1995. But his legacy endures, with Ruthless serving as the blueprint for every former drug dealer turned music mogul. Also, directly or indirectly, he has had a hand in the careers of some of today's biggest hip hop artists, including Dr. Dre, Eminem, 50 Cent, Snoop Dogg, and the Game. In the end, though, the most lasting image of Eazy-E will be of that fearless boy in the 'hood, cruising down the street in his '64.

Cheo Hodari Coker

THE N.W.A MEMBER WITH THE MOST STREET PEDIGREE ALSO HAD THE MOST BUSINESS ACUMEN.

CERTIFIED GANGSTA: Eazy-E gave voice to a desperate generation.

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